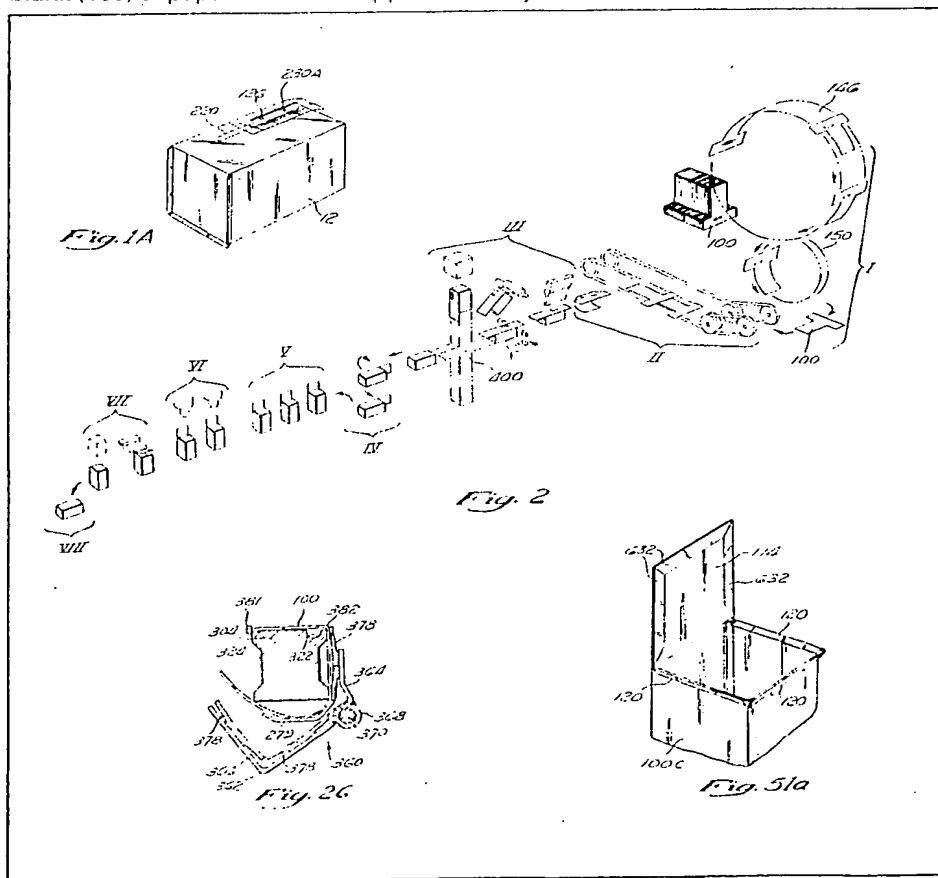


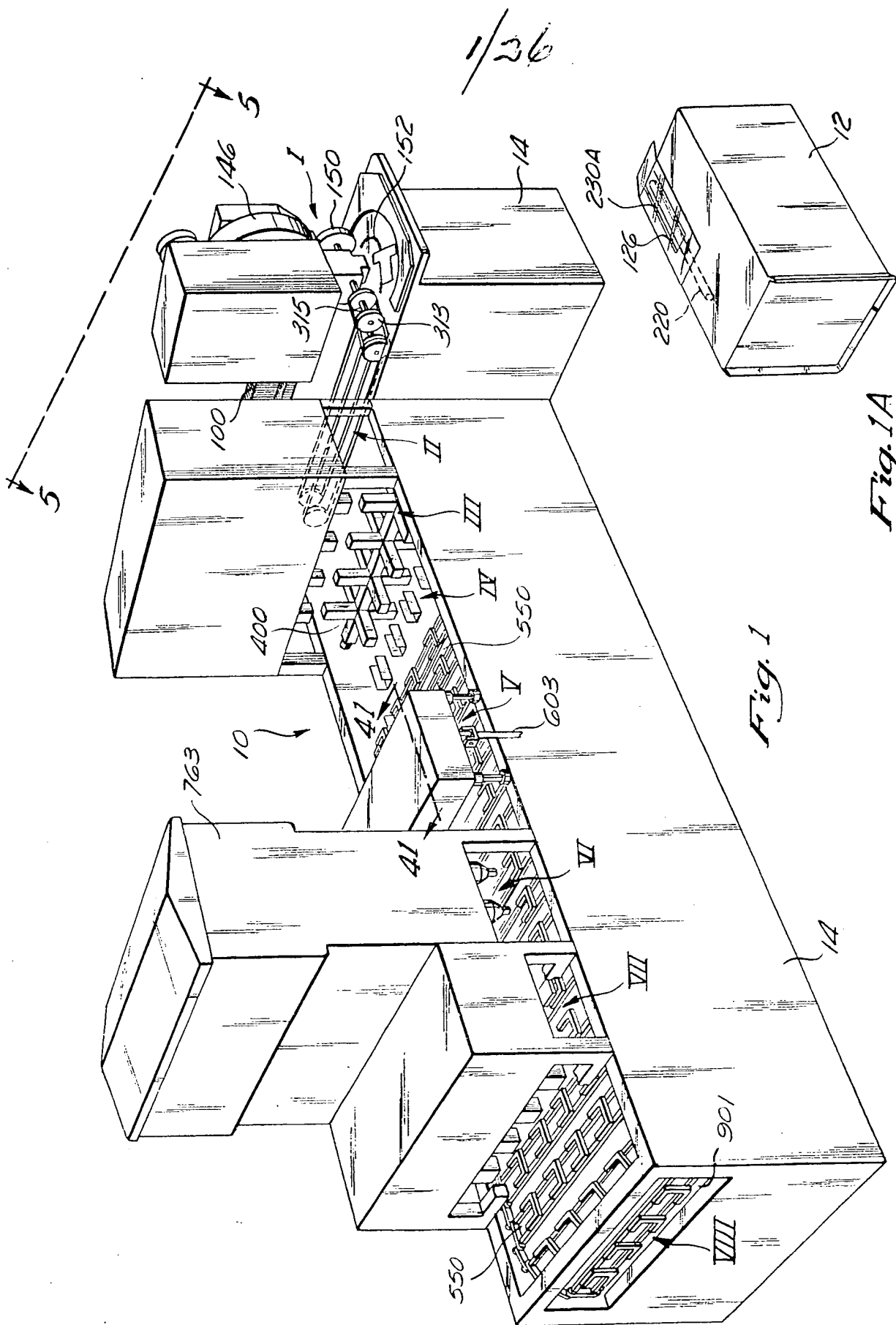
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GB 1476754
US 4123966A
US 3918236A
US 3800677A
(58) Field of search
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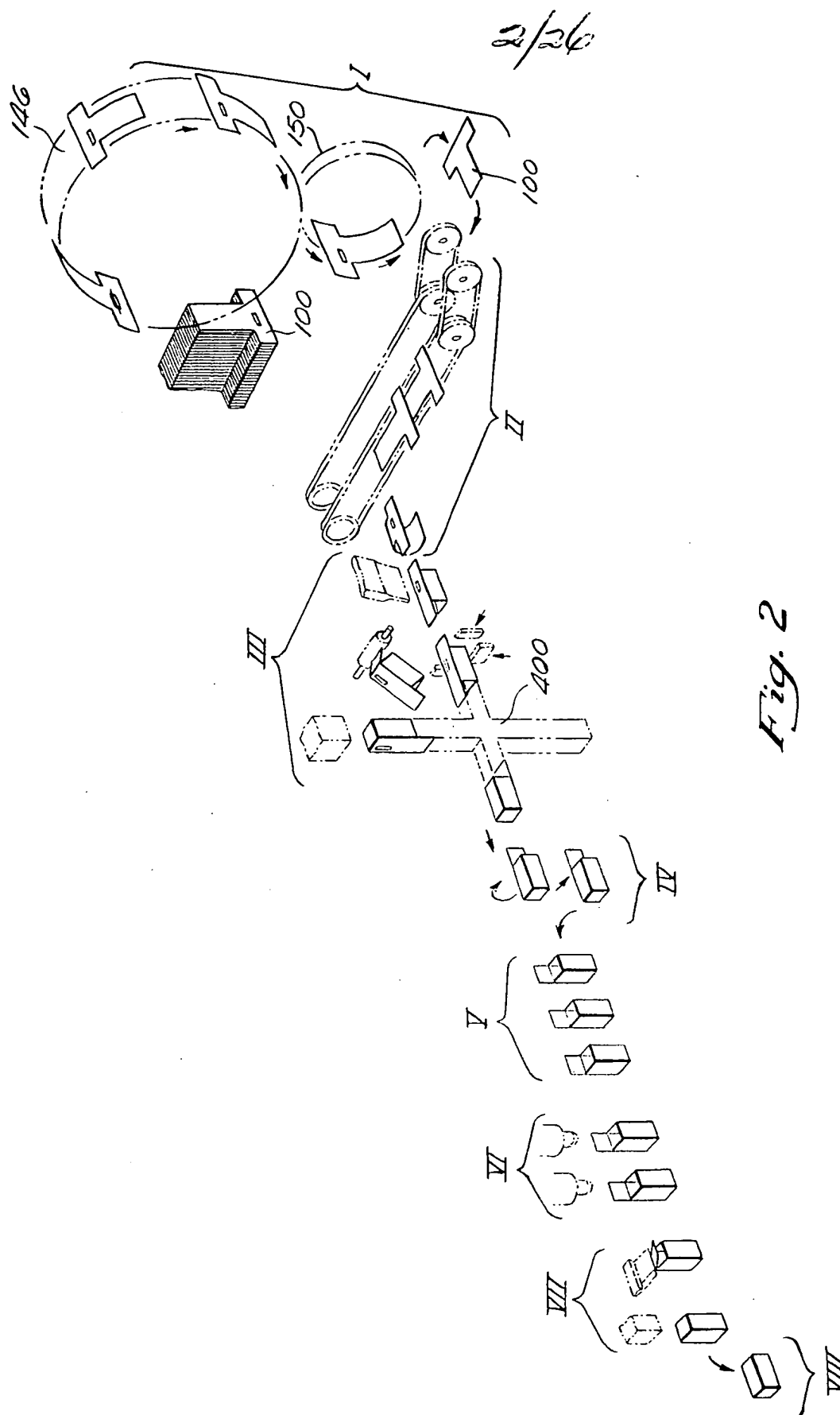
(54) Liquid container with straw

(57) Apparatus forms a liquid-tight container having a rectangular cross-section from a one-piece, T-shaped blank (100) of paperboard. The appar-

atus automatically bonds a polythene panel and straw 220 to the carton blank on a rotating vacuum-hold heat-sealing and alignment drum (146). A conveyor collates carton blanks with four side-by-side forming mandrels (only one of which is shown at 304 in Figure 26). An ultrasonic welder bonds the side seams and end closure panels of each of four containers on side-by-side rotating crossbar mandrels (400) which eliminate any misalignment during the sealing process. A conveyor then carries the carton blanks through pre-form (see Figure 51a), two-stage filler, and end-closure work stations, including anvils for ultrasonic welding. An ejector mechanism ejects the filled carton blanks from the rigid conveyor along a dual direction path, thereby eliminating the possibility of creasing or puncturing the filled and sealed container. The apparatus accommodates the production of differing size containers with five adjustments.







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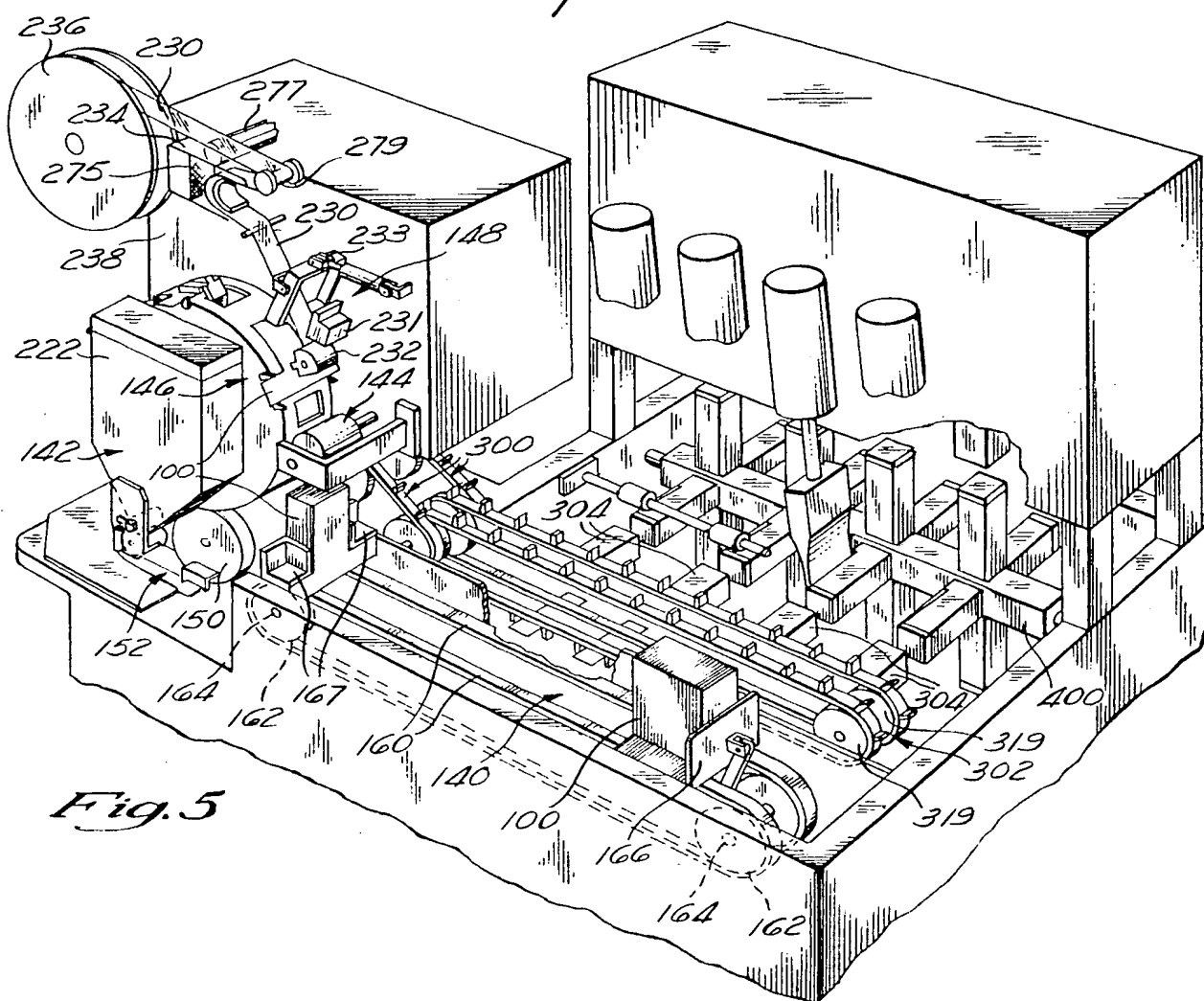


Fig. 5

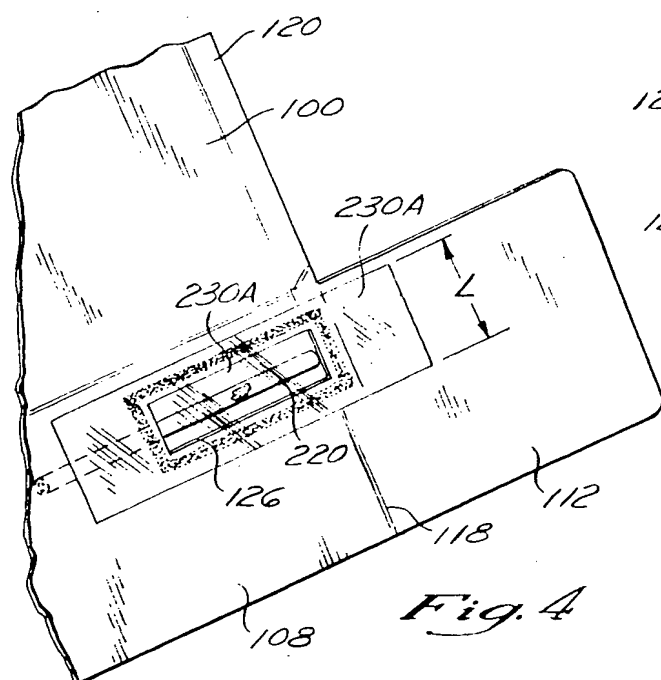


Fig. 4

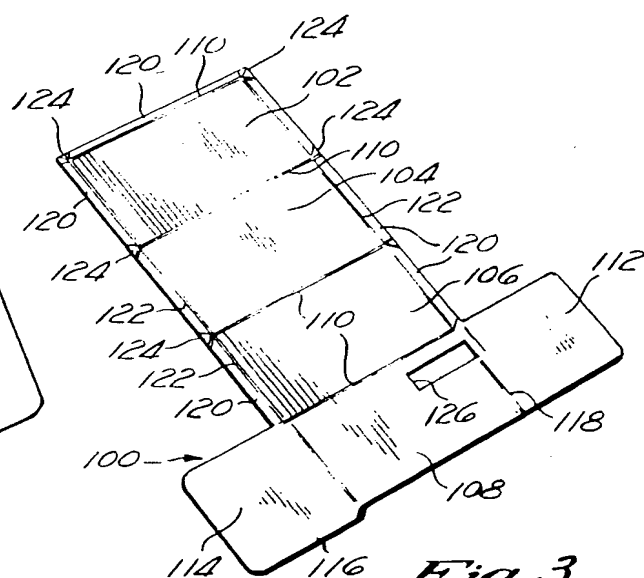


Fig. 3

Fig. 6

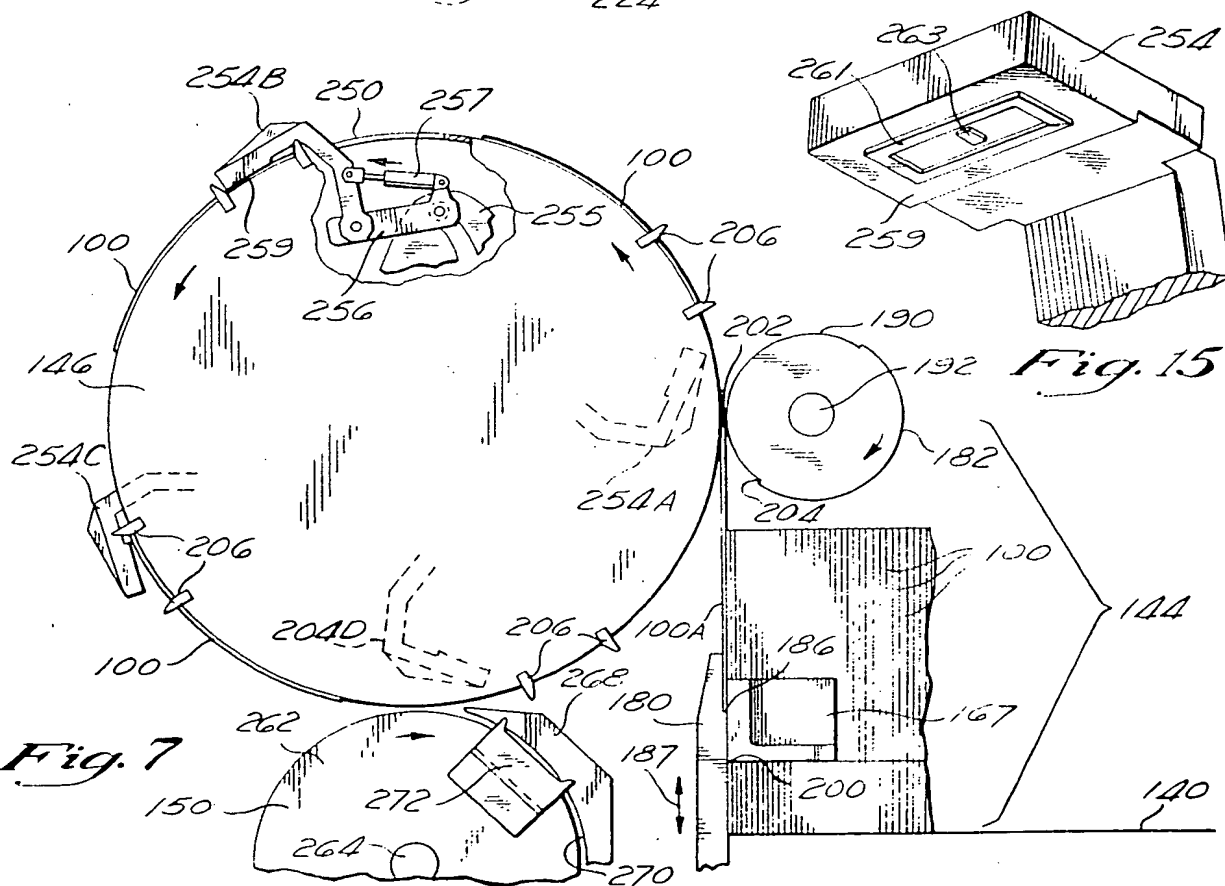
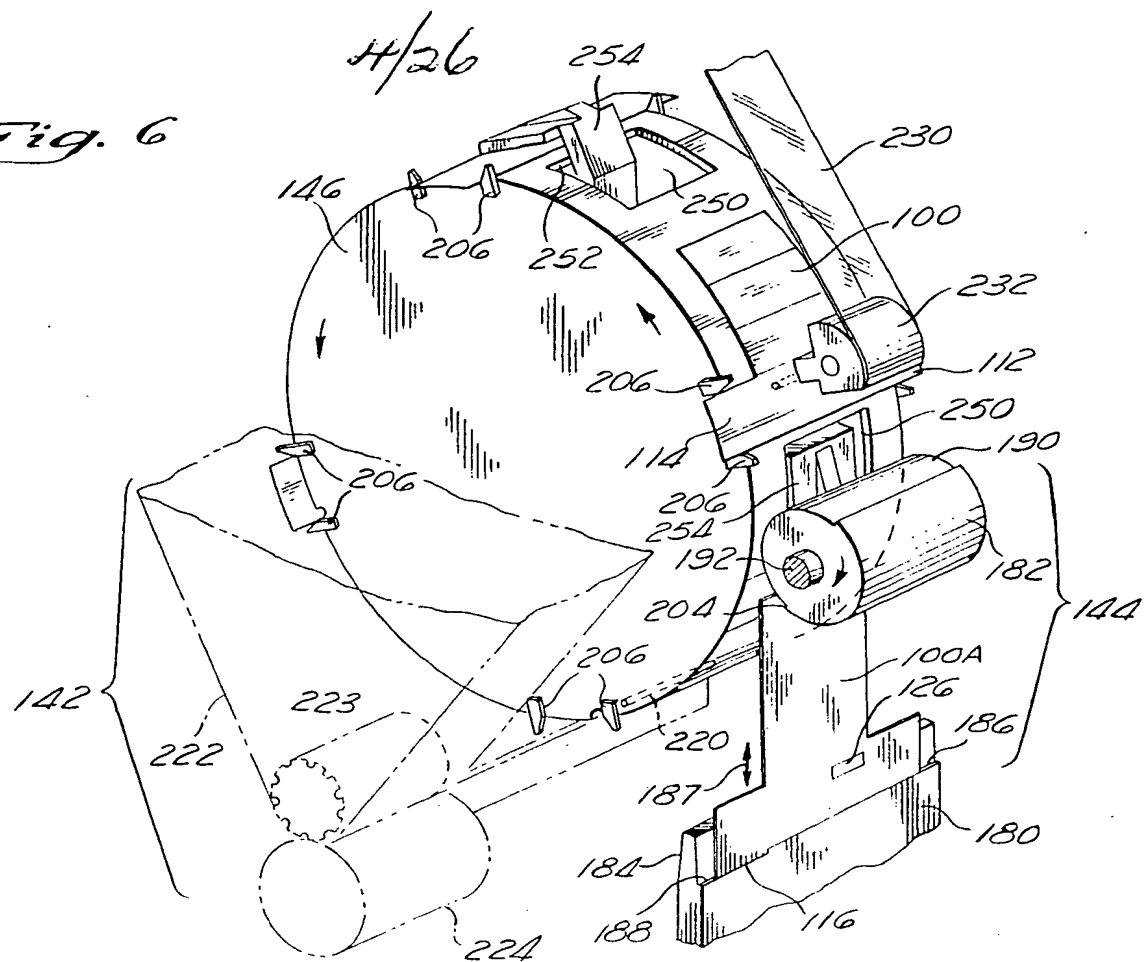
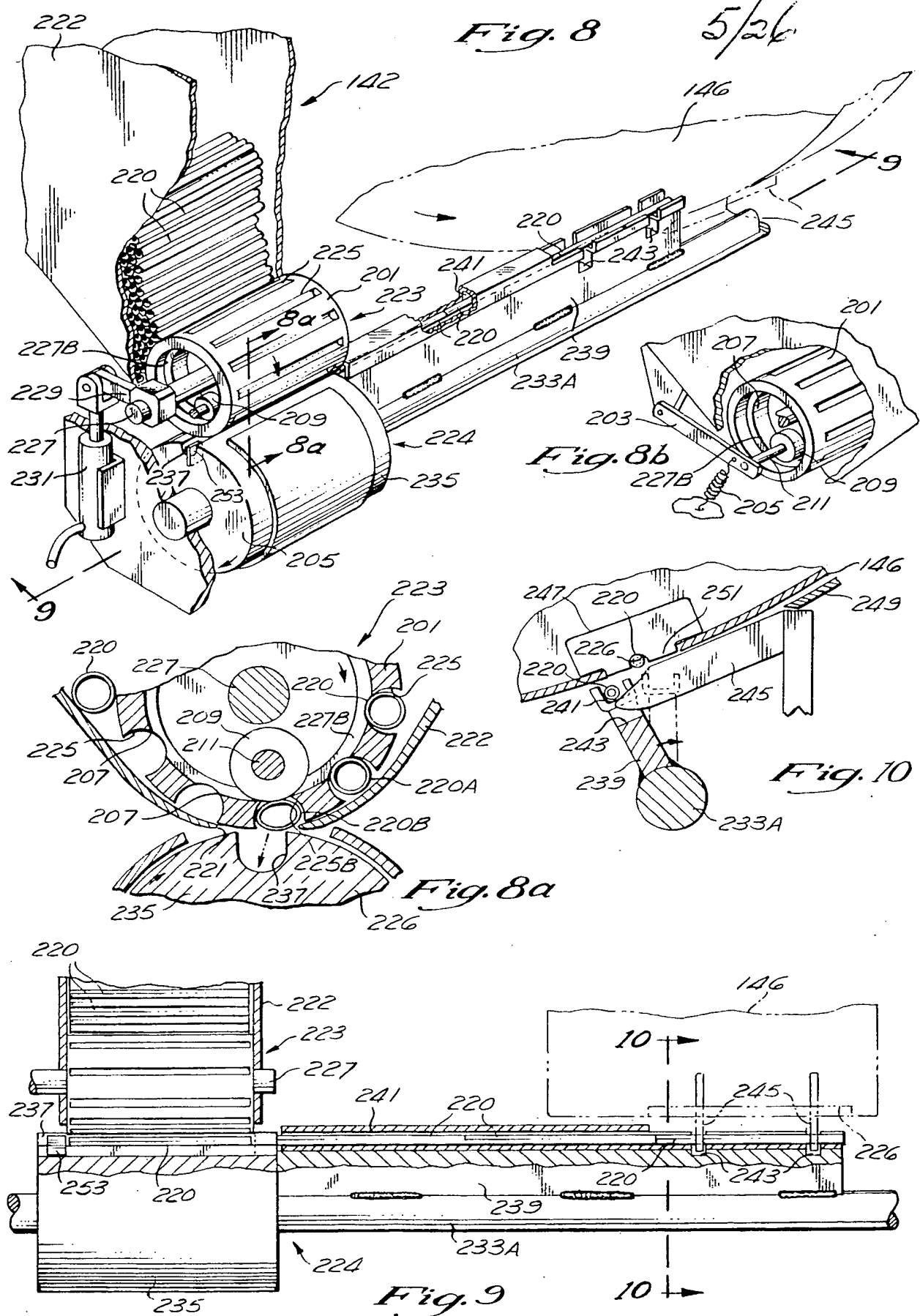


Fig. 15



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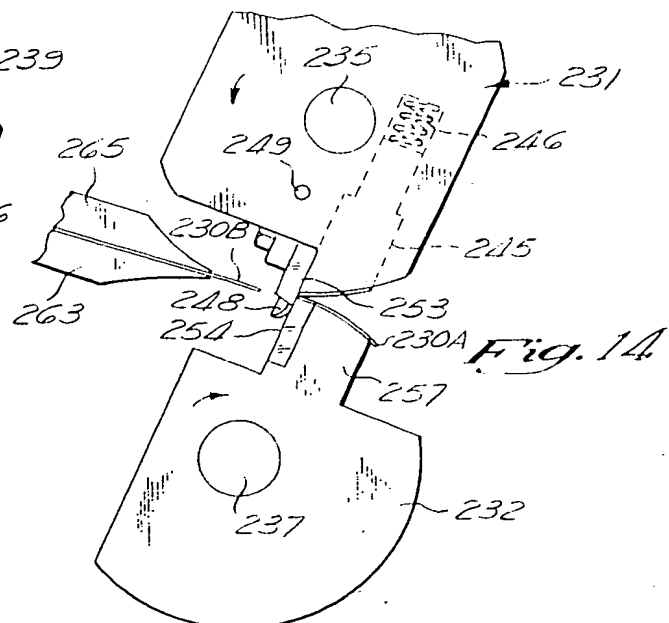
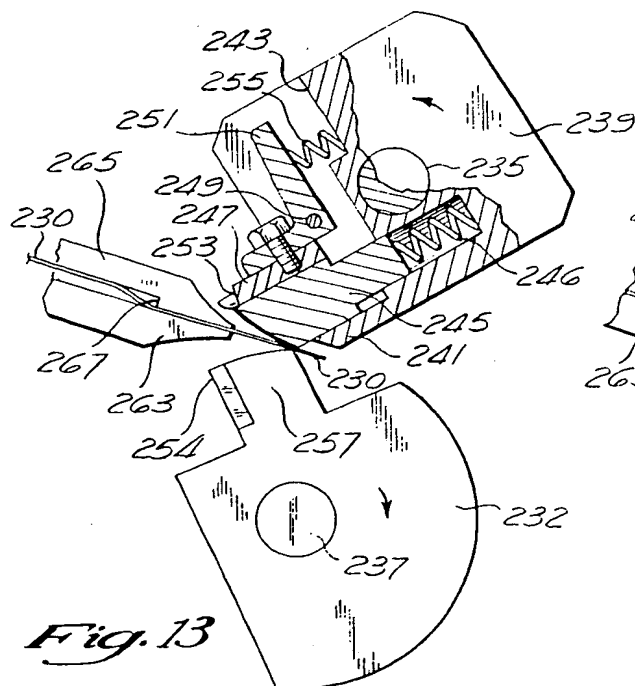
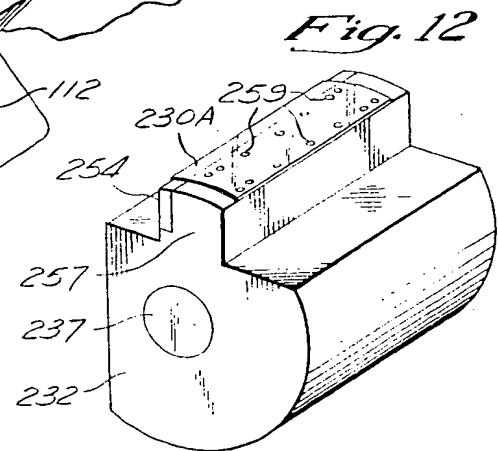
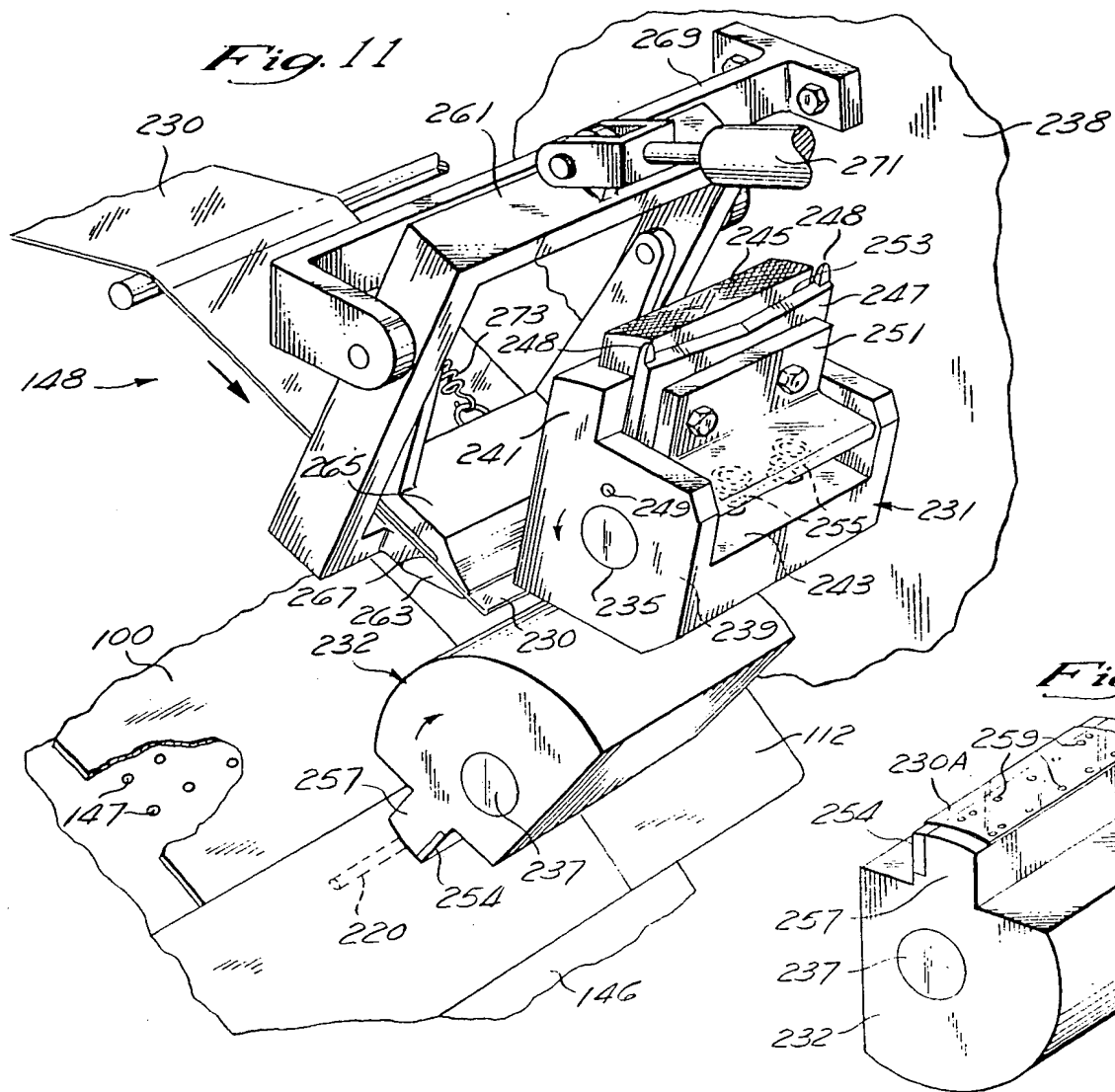


Fig. 16

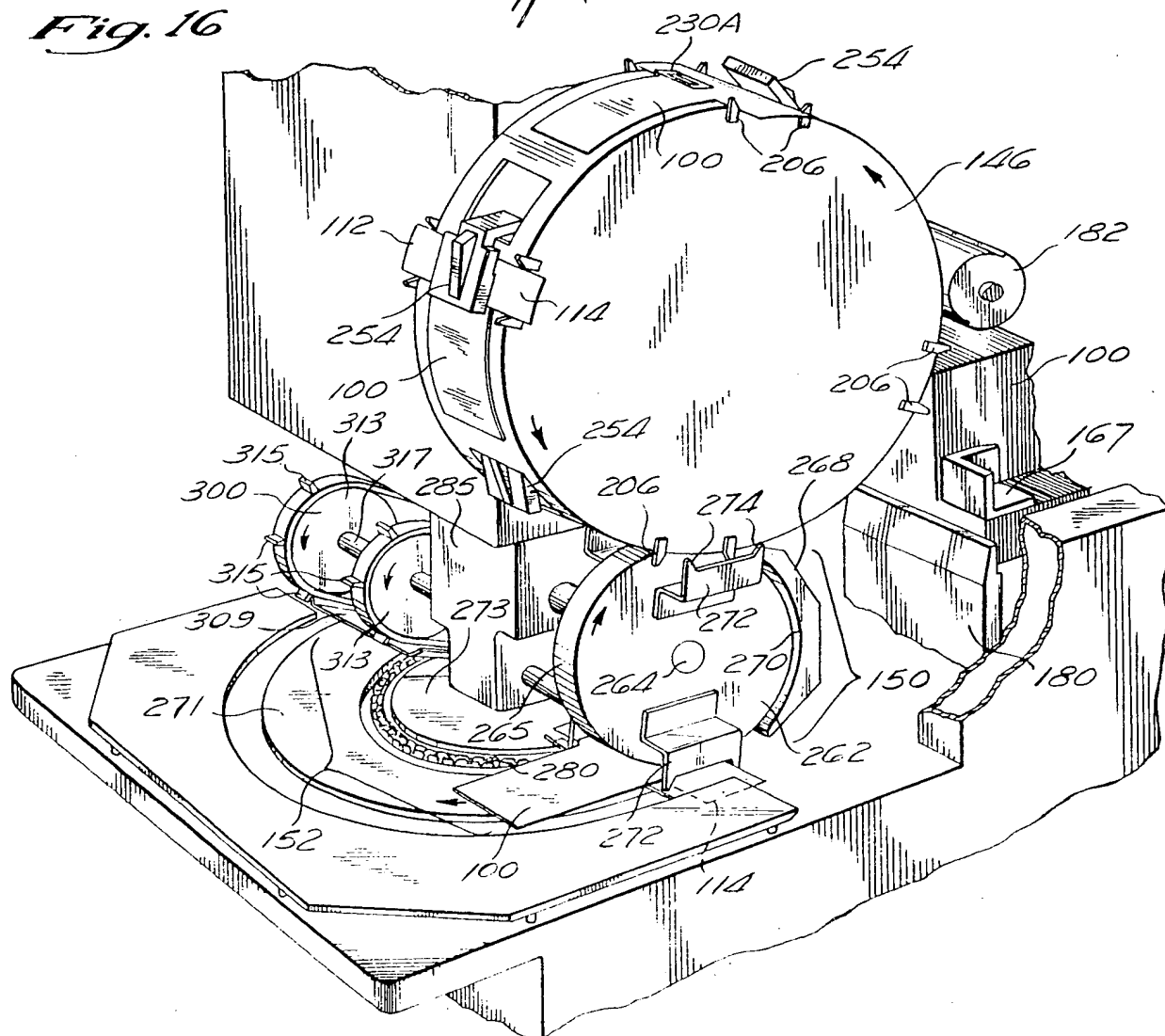


Fig. 17

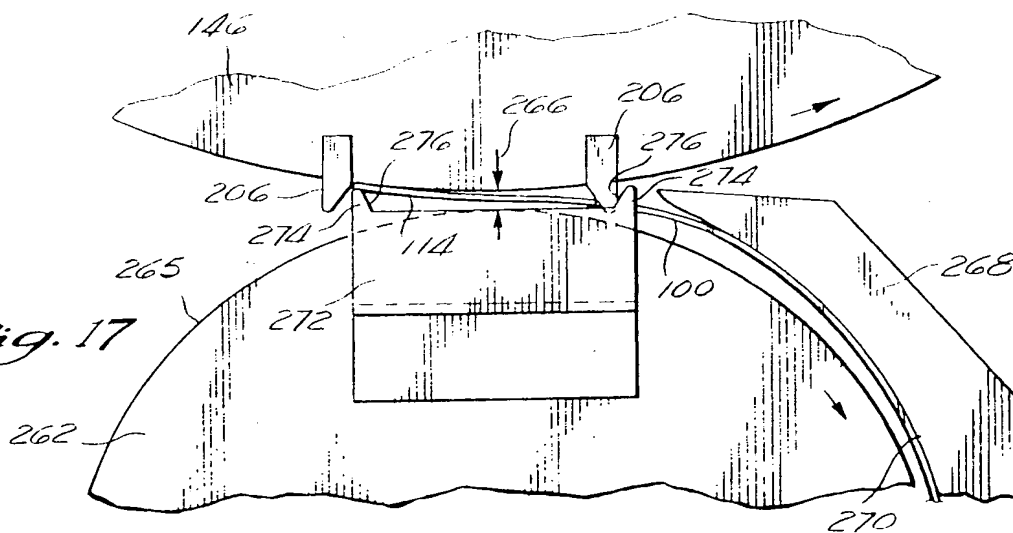


Fig. 20

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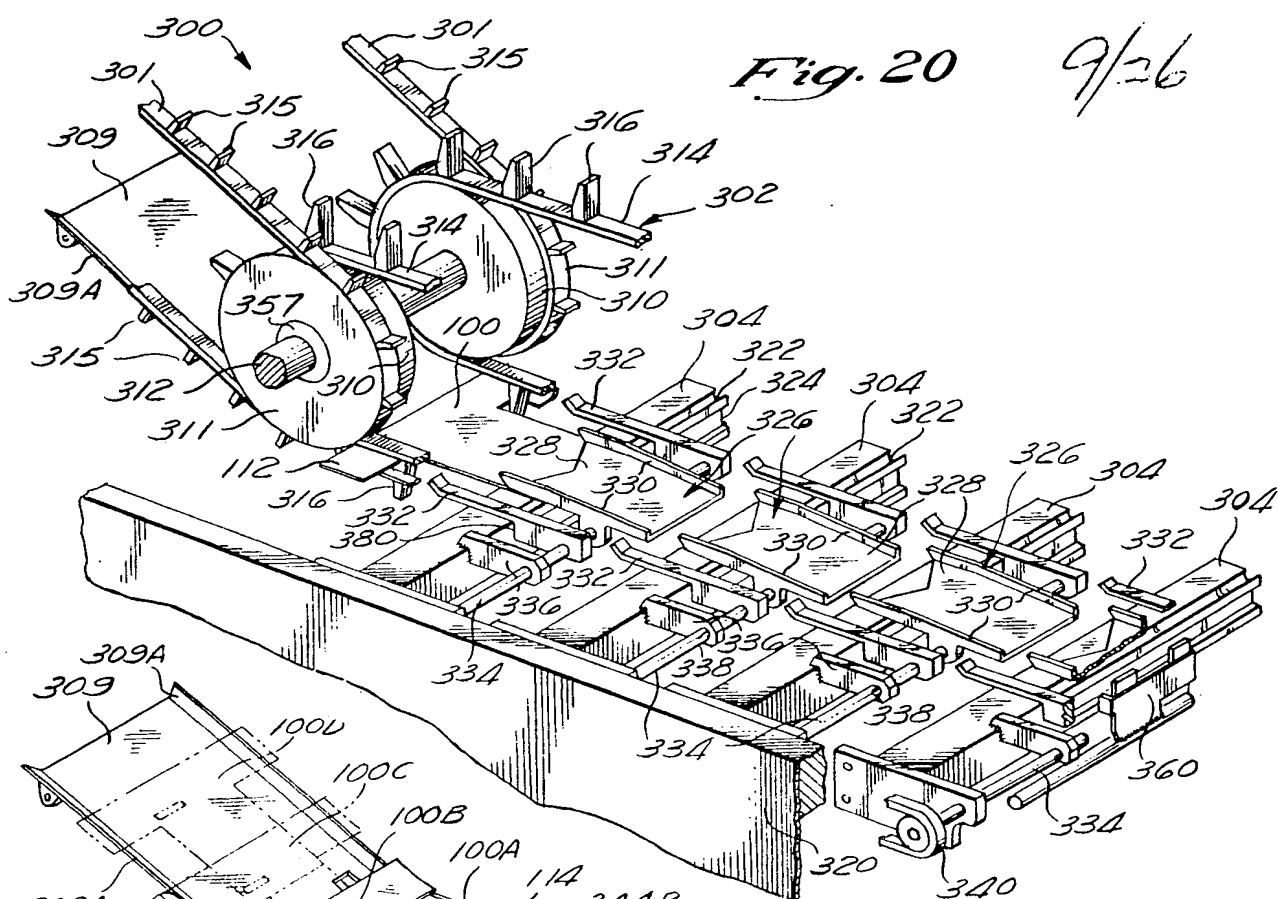


Fig. 21

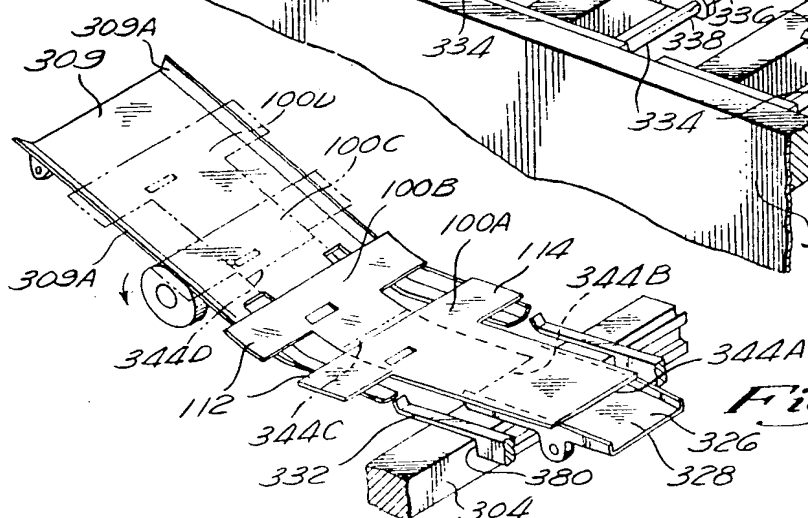
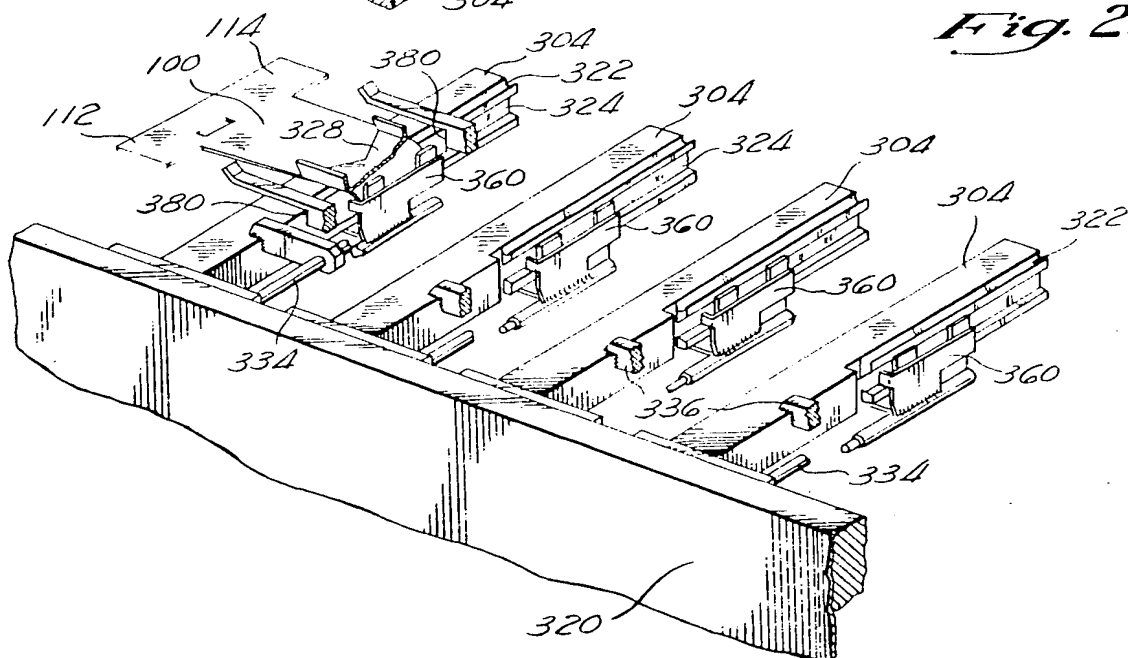


Fig. 22



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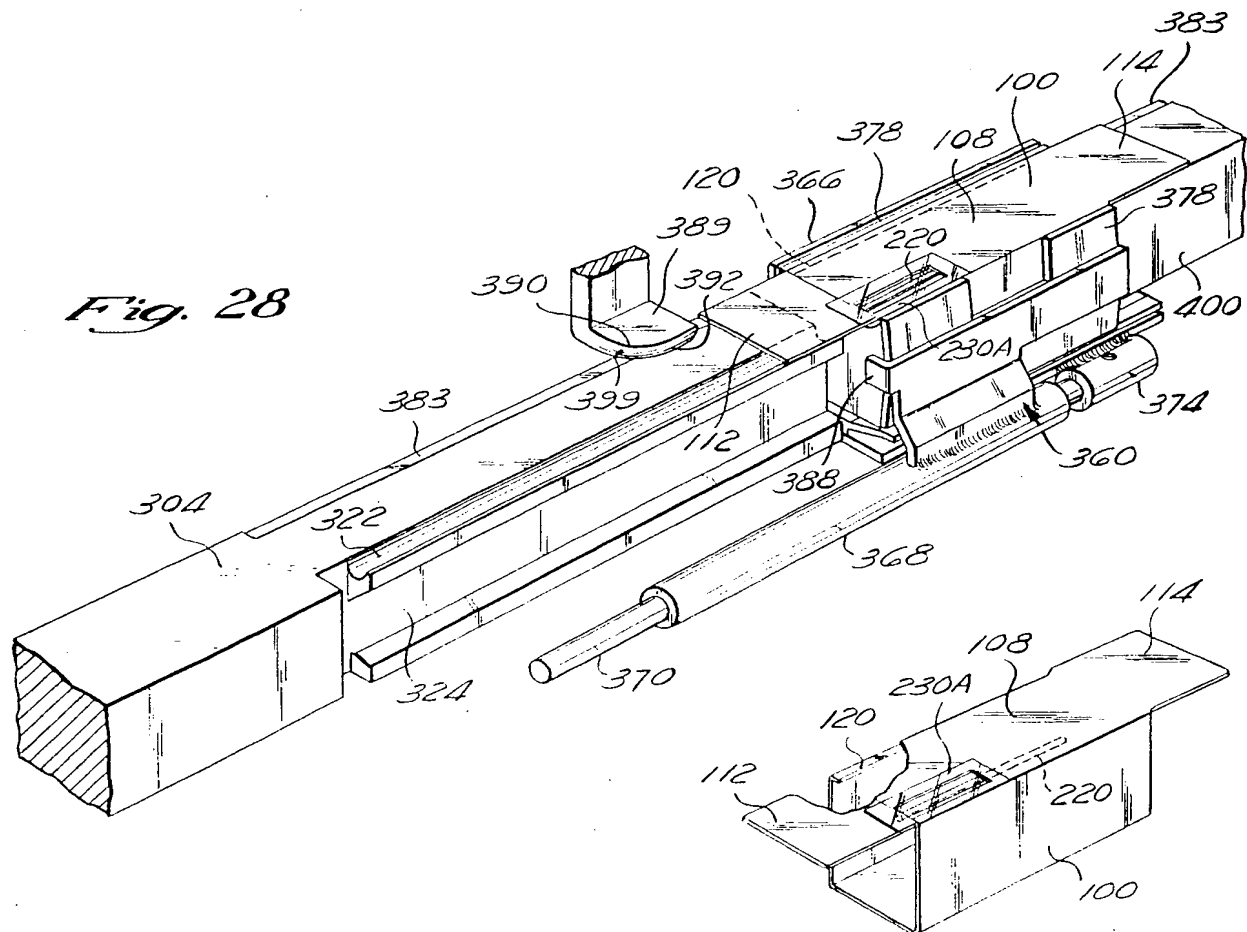


Fig. 28

Fig. 29

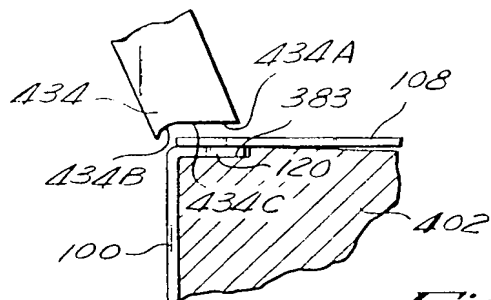


Fig. 28a

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Fig. 33

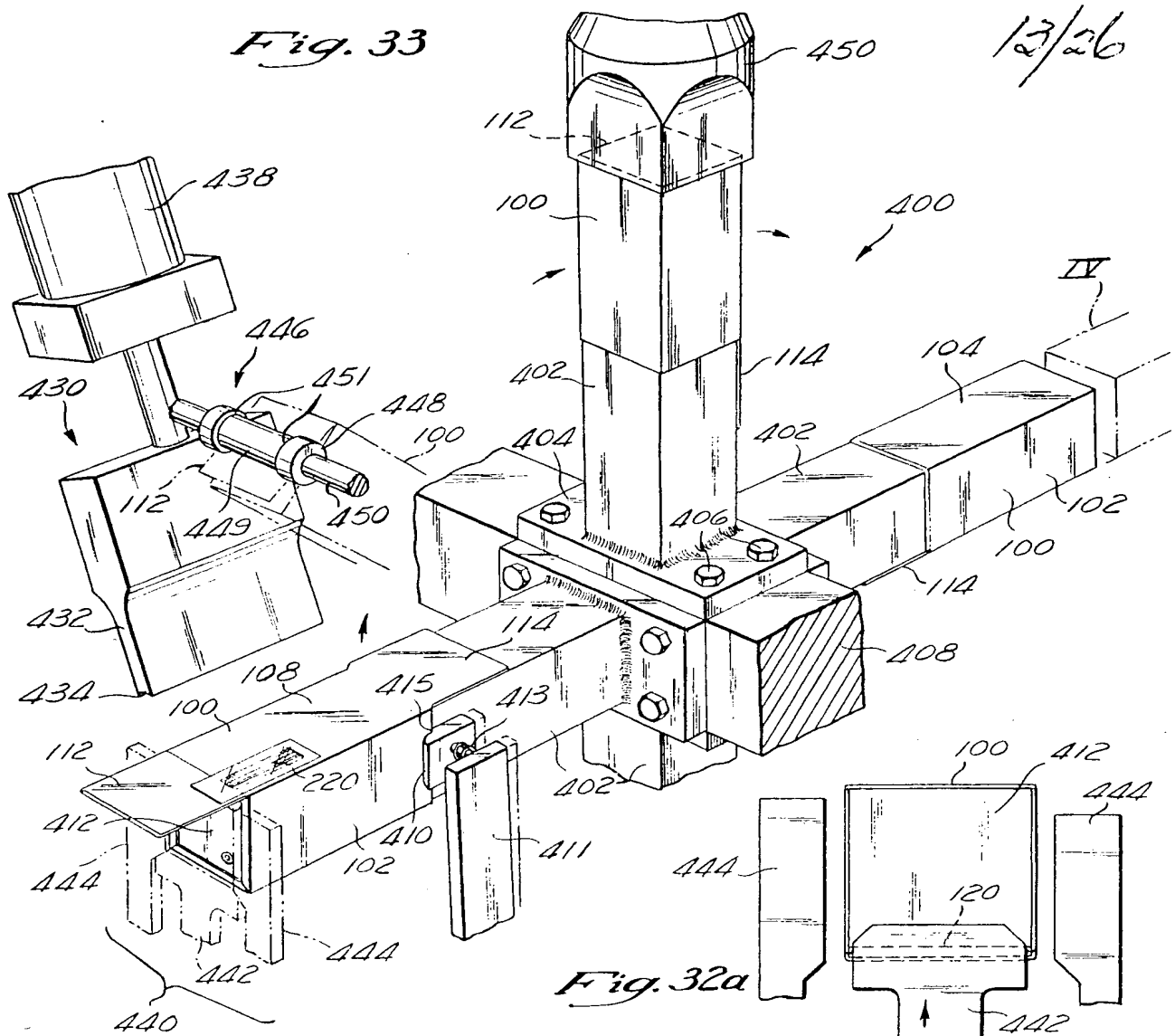


Fig. 32a

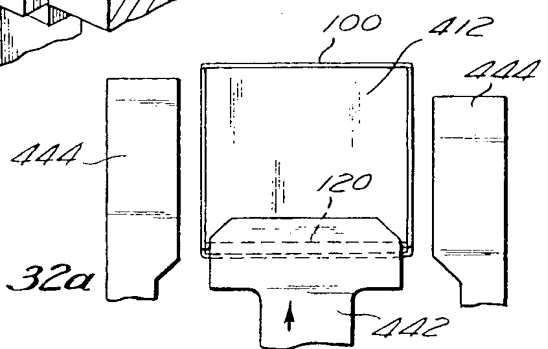


Fig. 32b

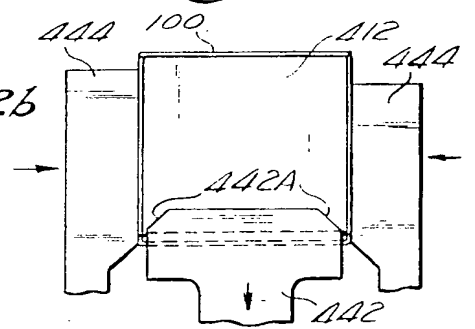


Fig. 32c

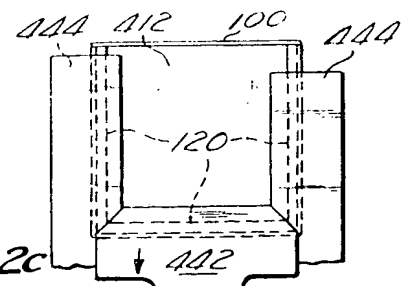
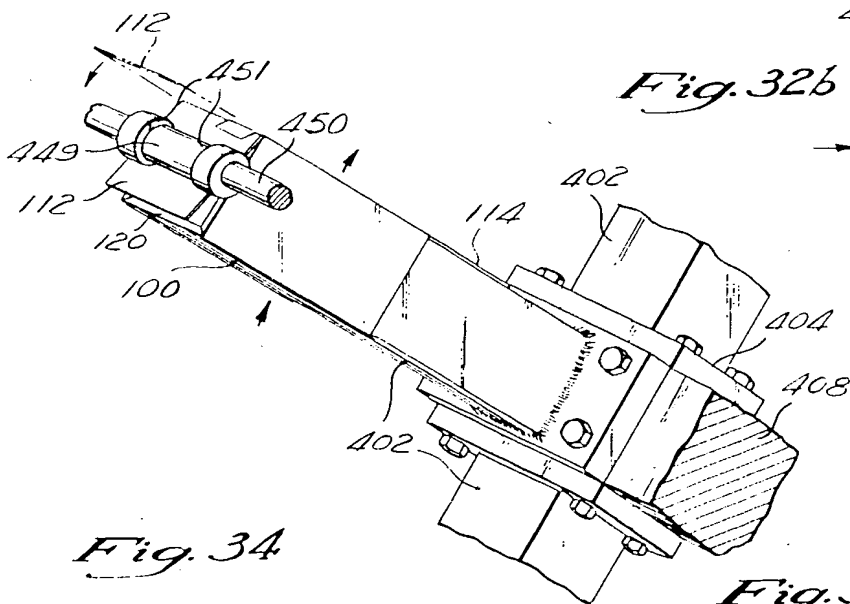
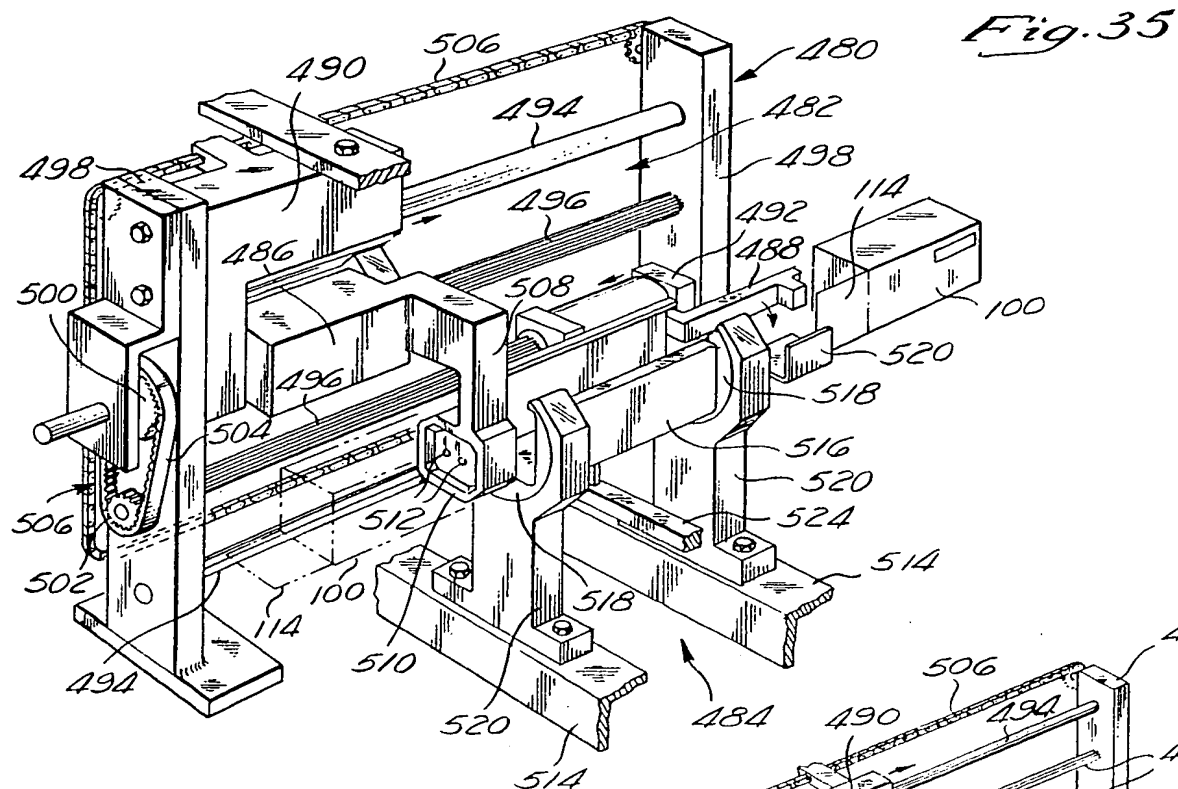
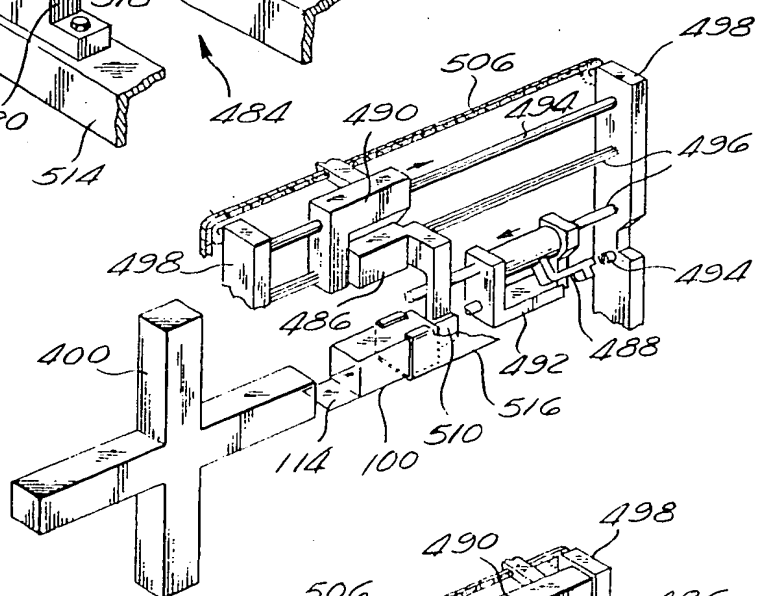
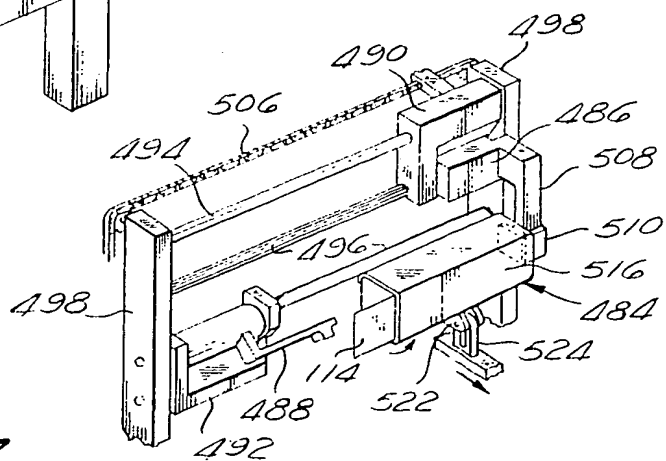


Fig. 34



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*Fig. 36**Fig. 37*

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Fig. 38

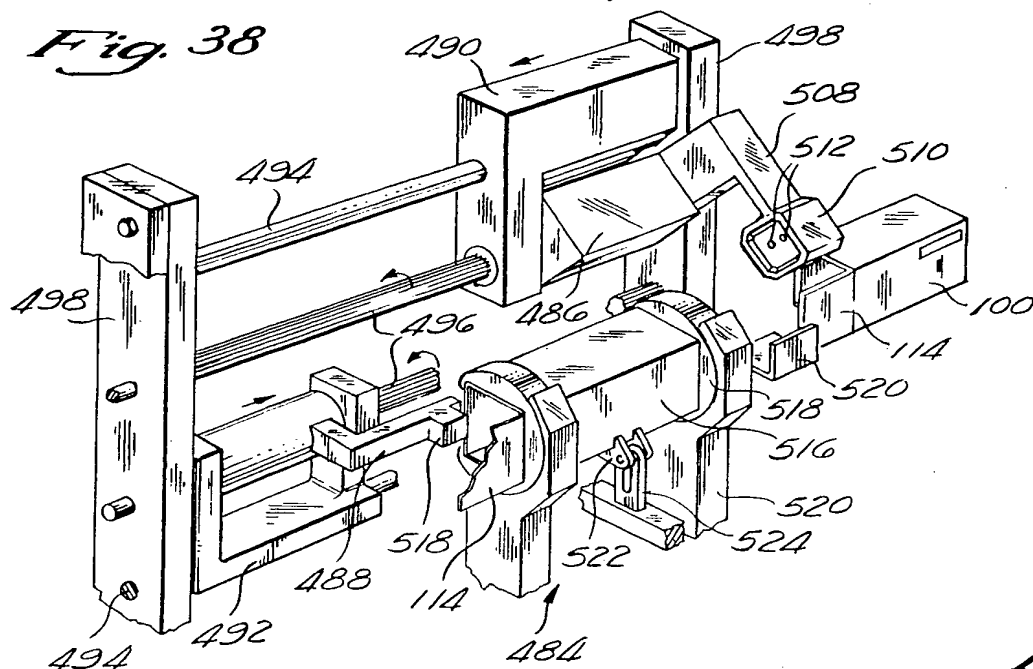


Fig. 40A

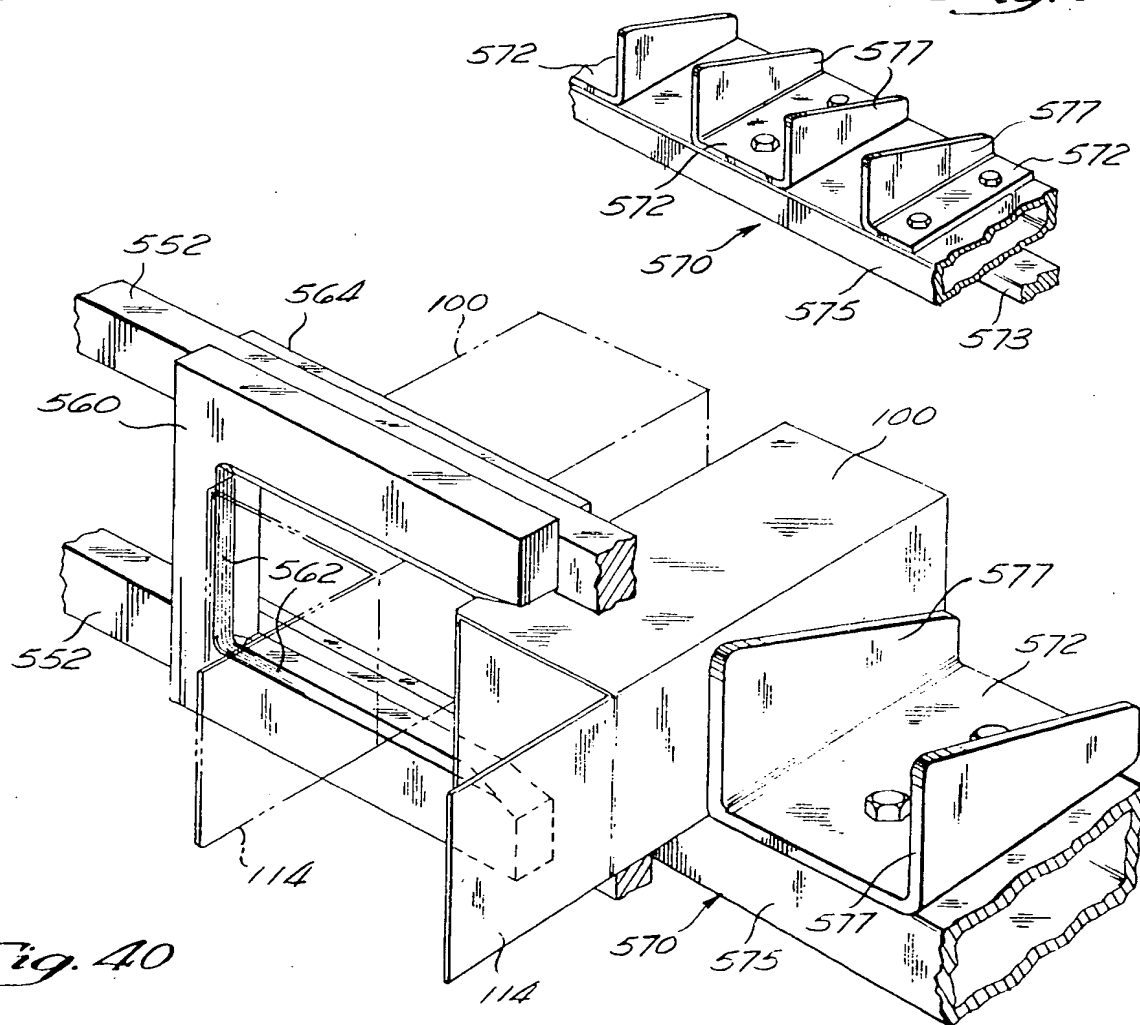
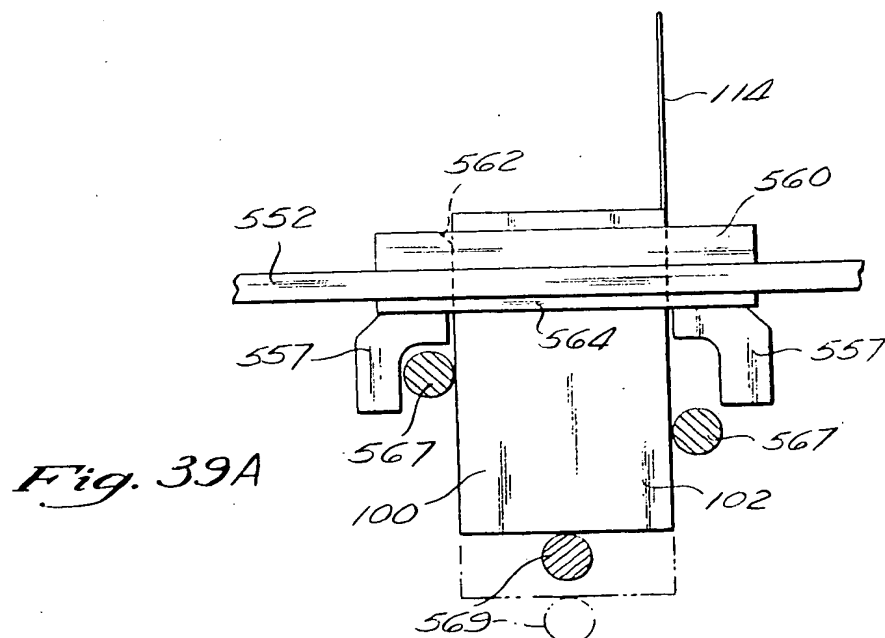
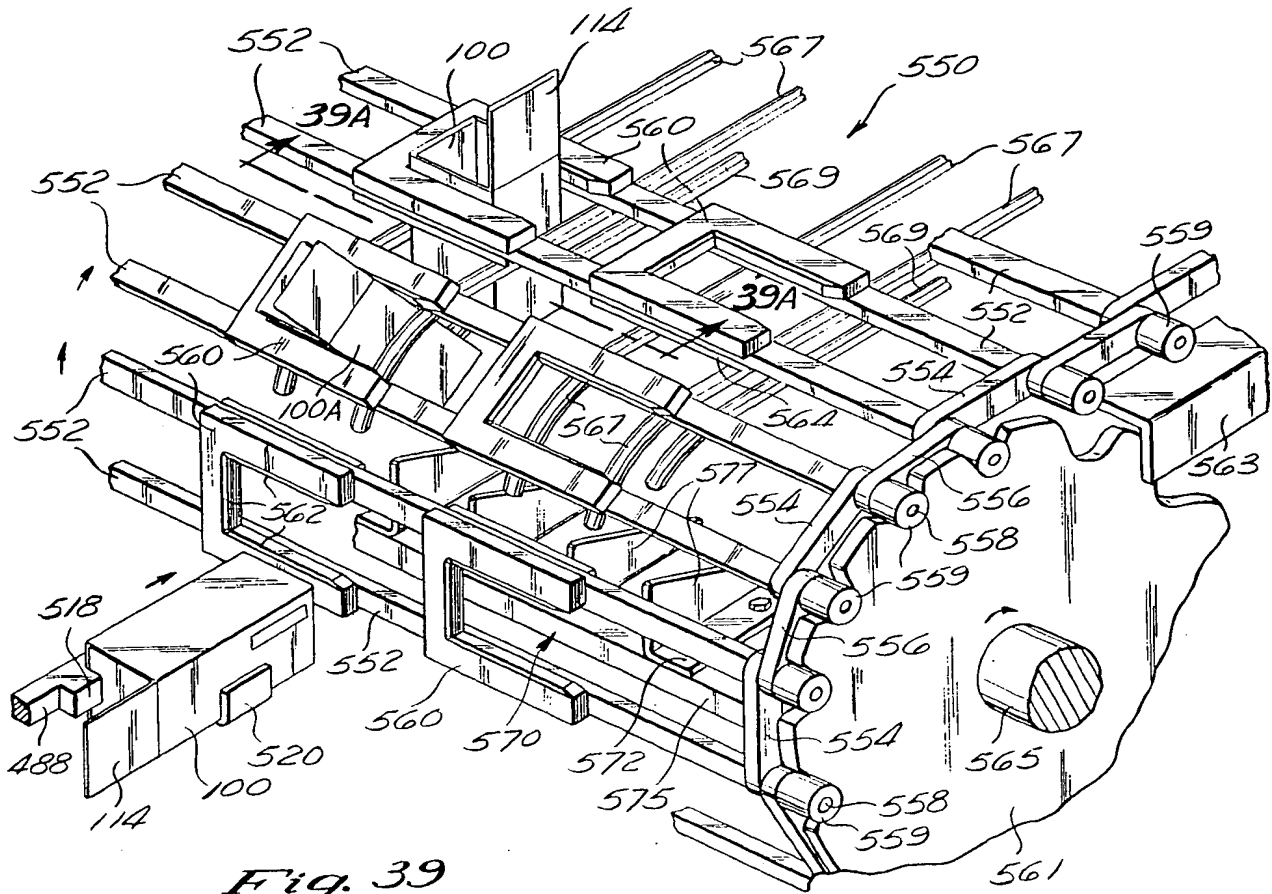
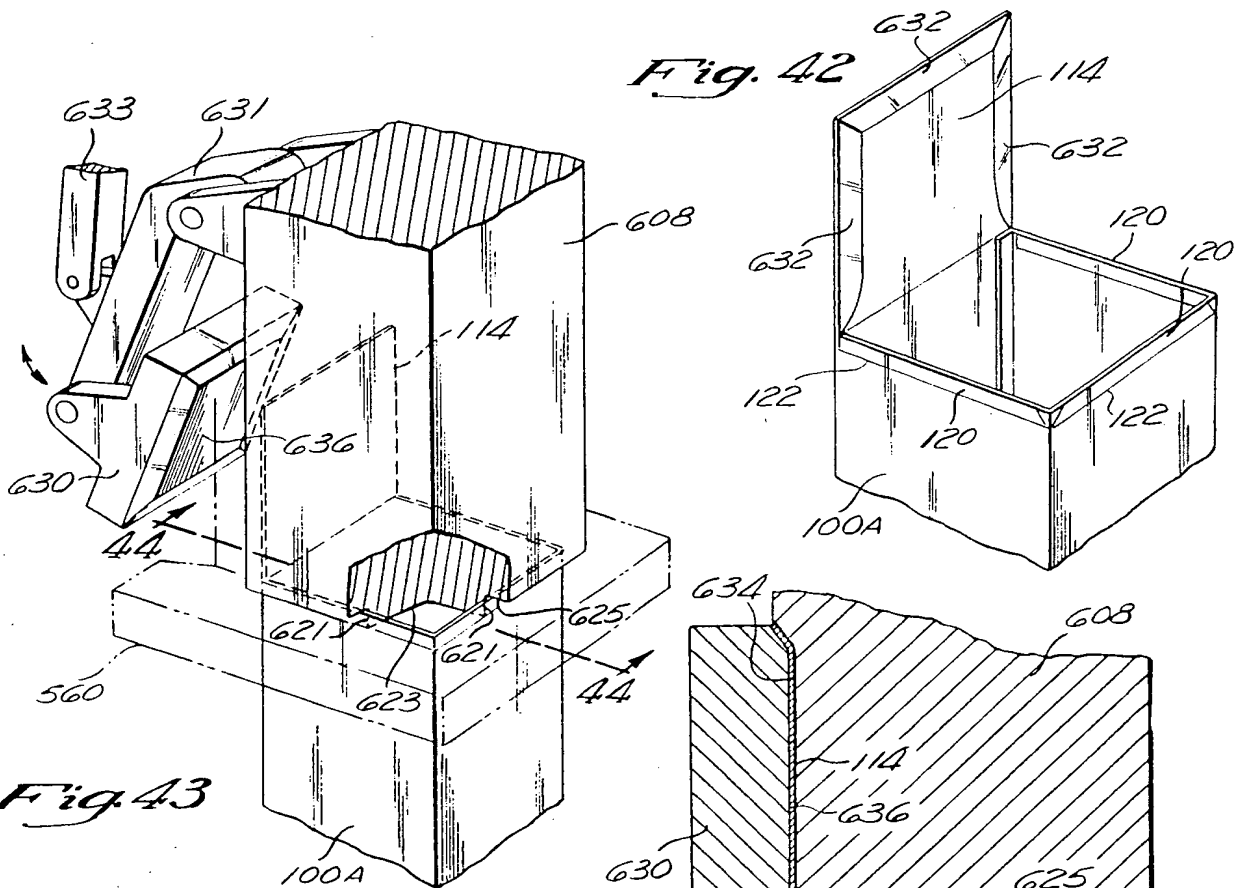
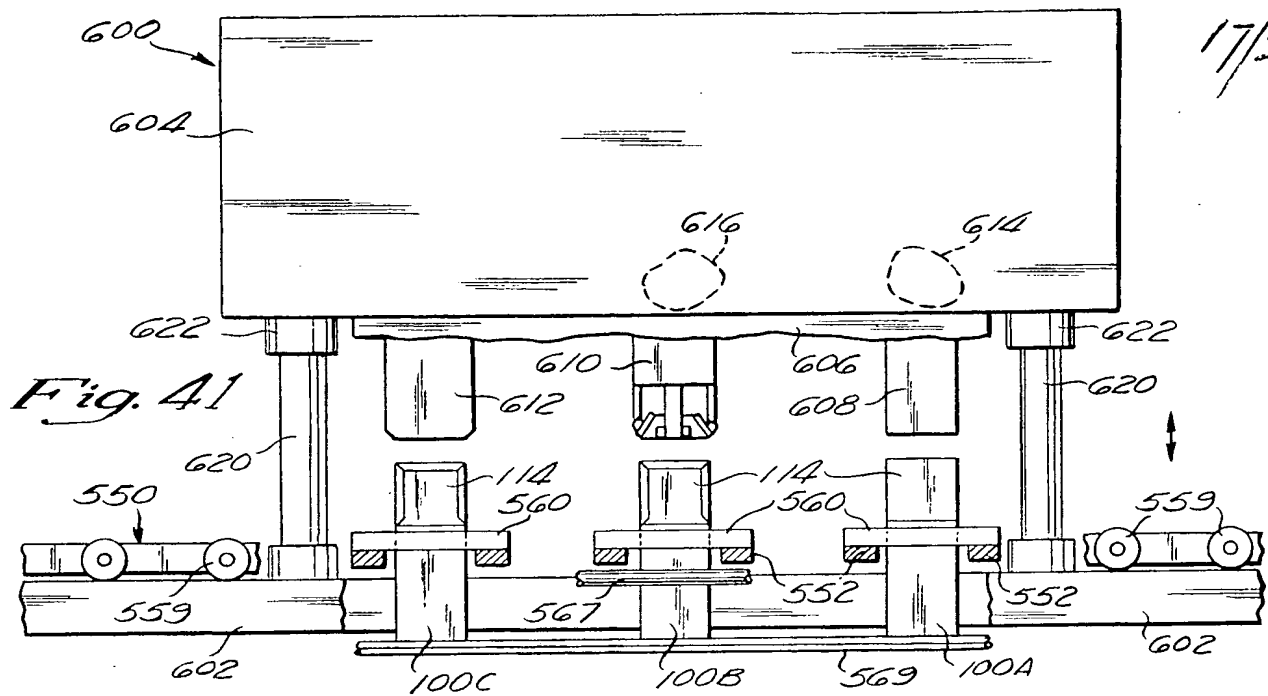
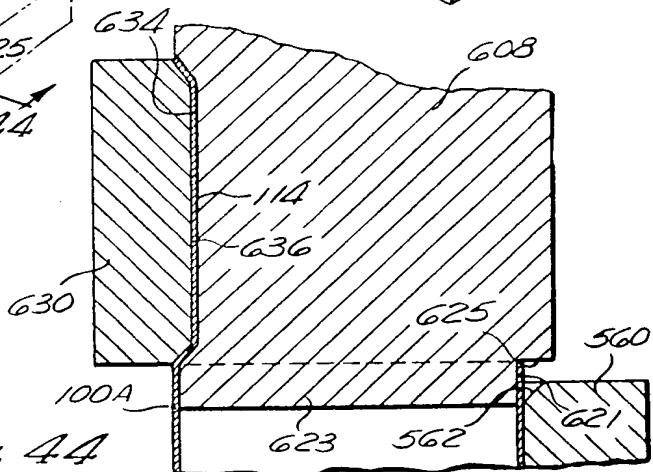


Fig. 40

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**Fig. 44**

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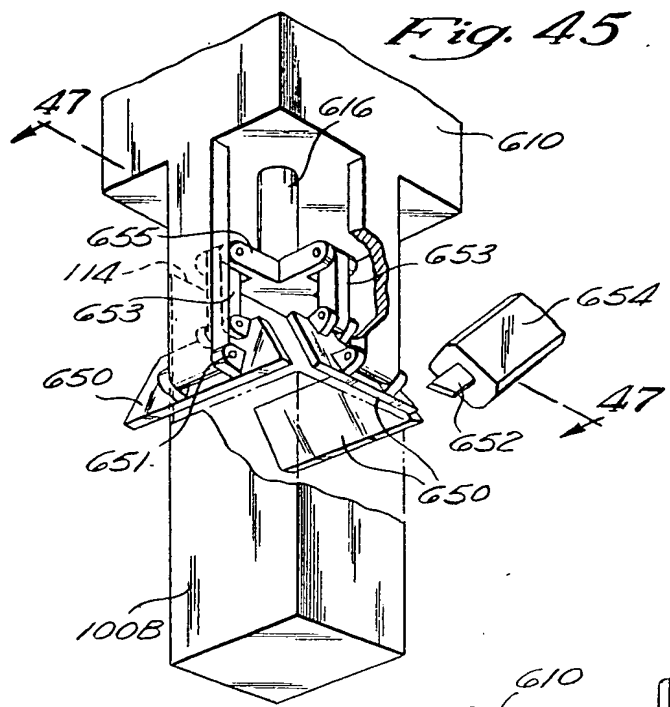


Fig. 48

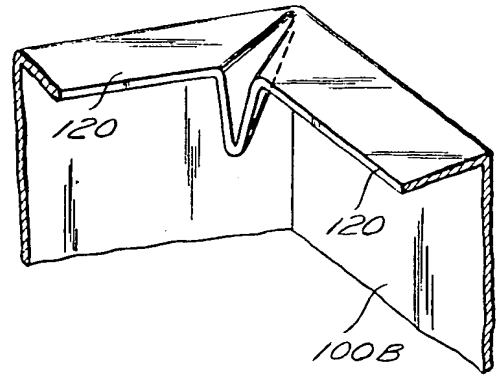


Fig. 47

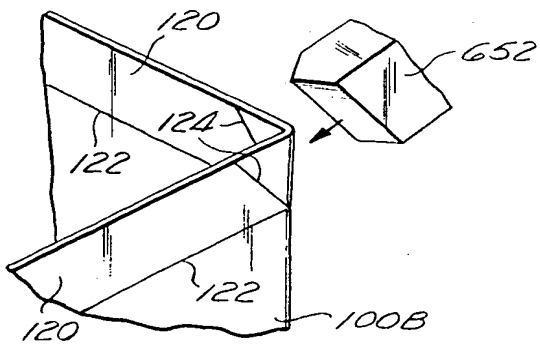
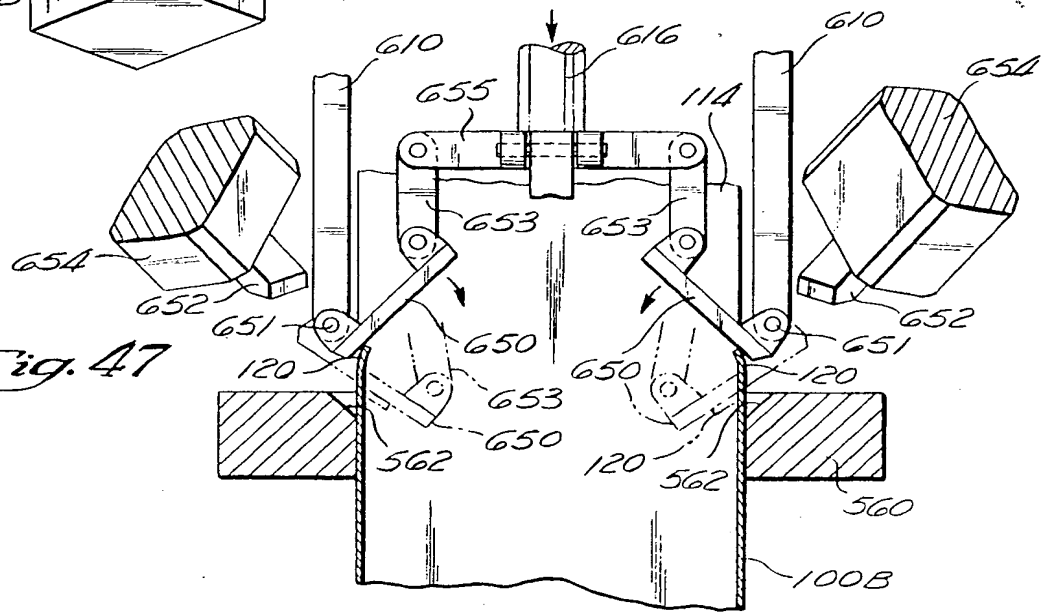


Fig. 46

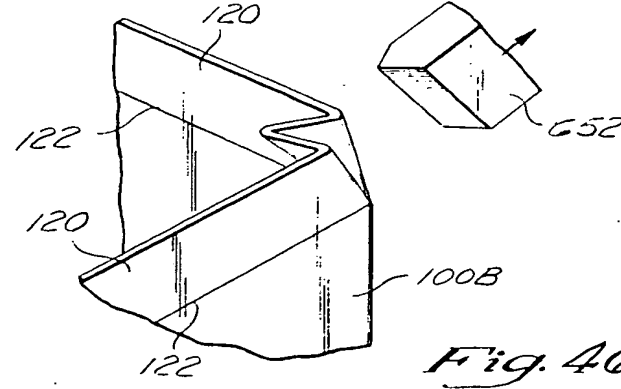


Fig. 46a

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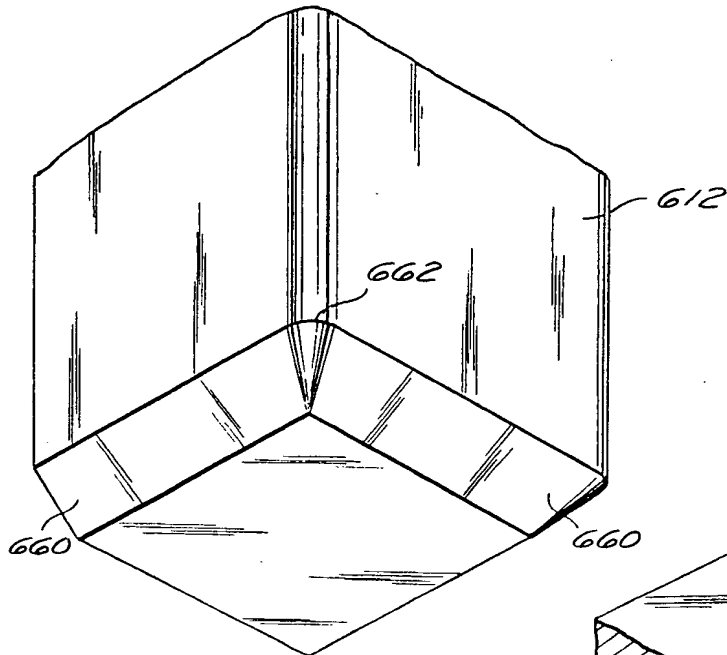


Fig. 49

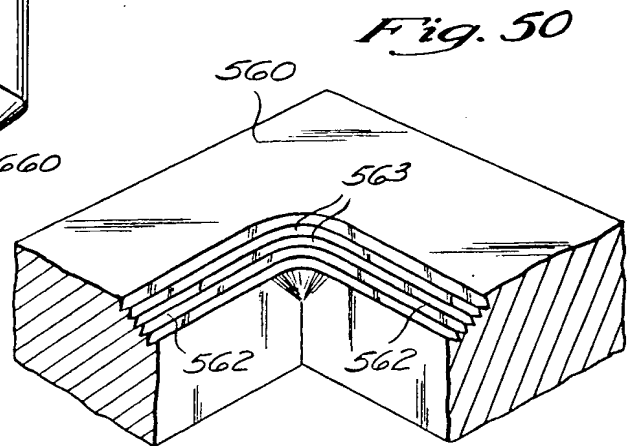


Fig. 50

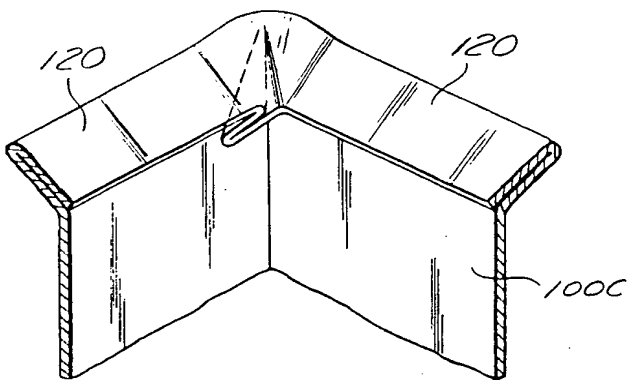


Fig. 51

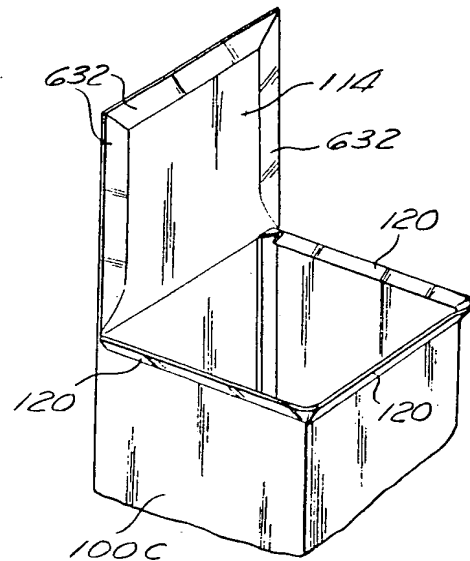
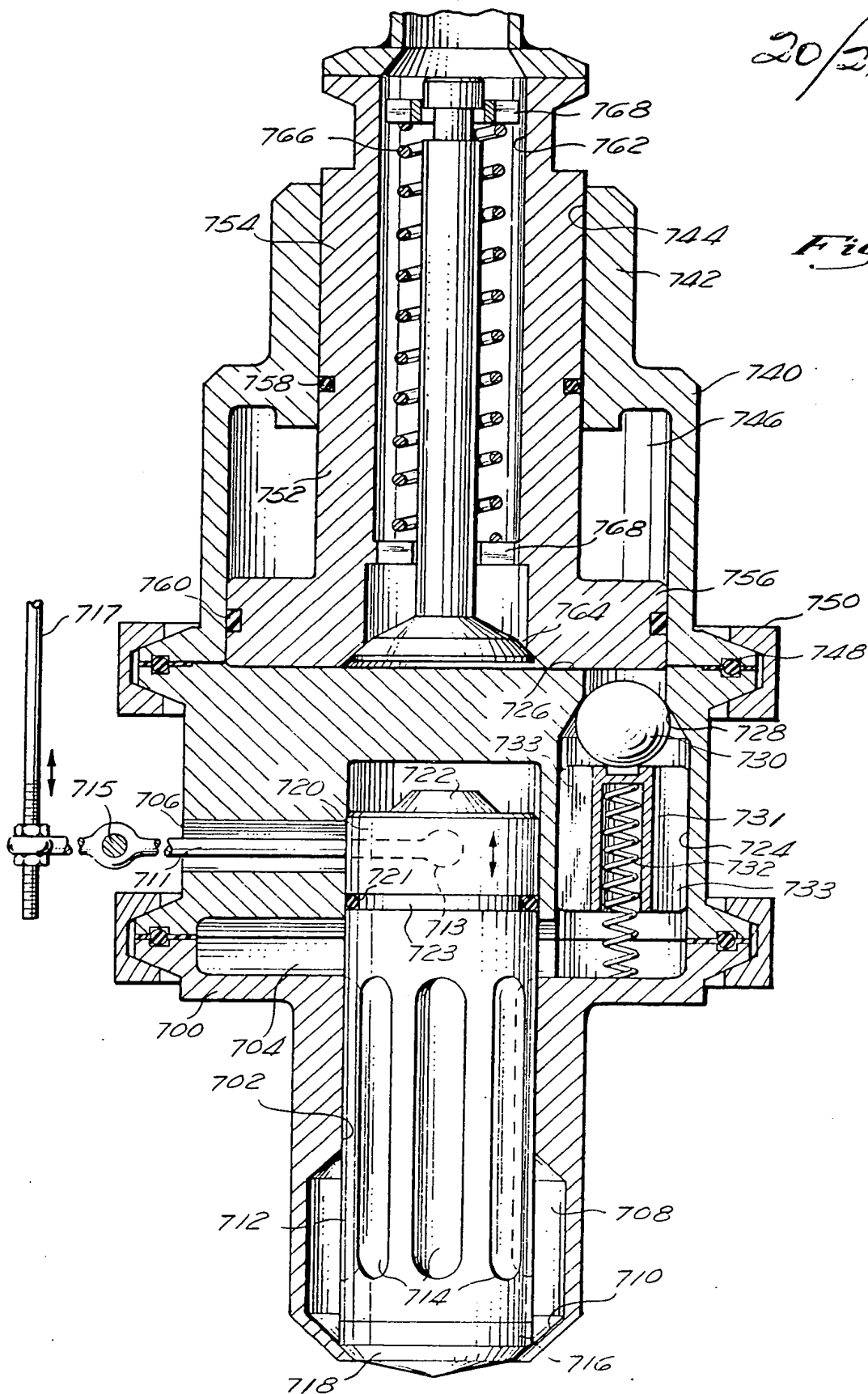


Fig. 51a

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Fig. 52



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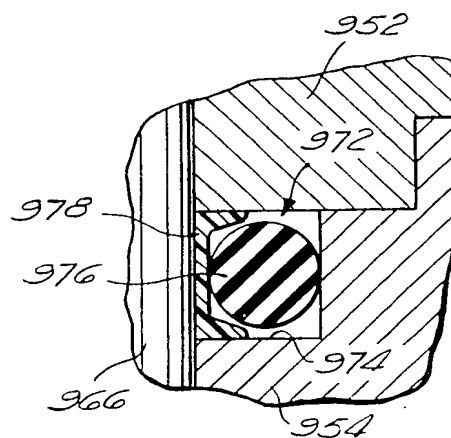
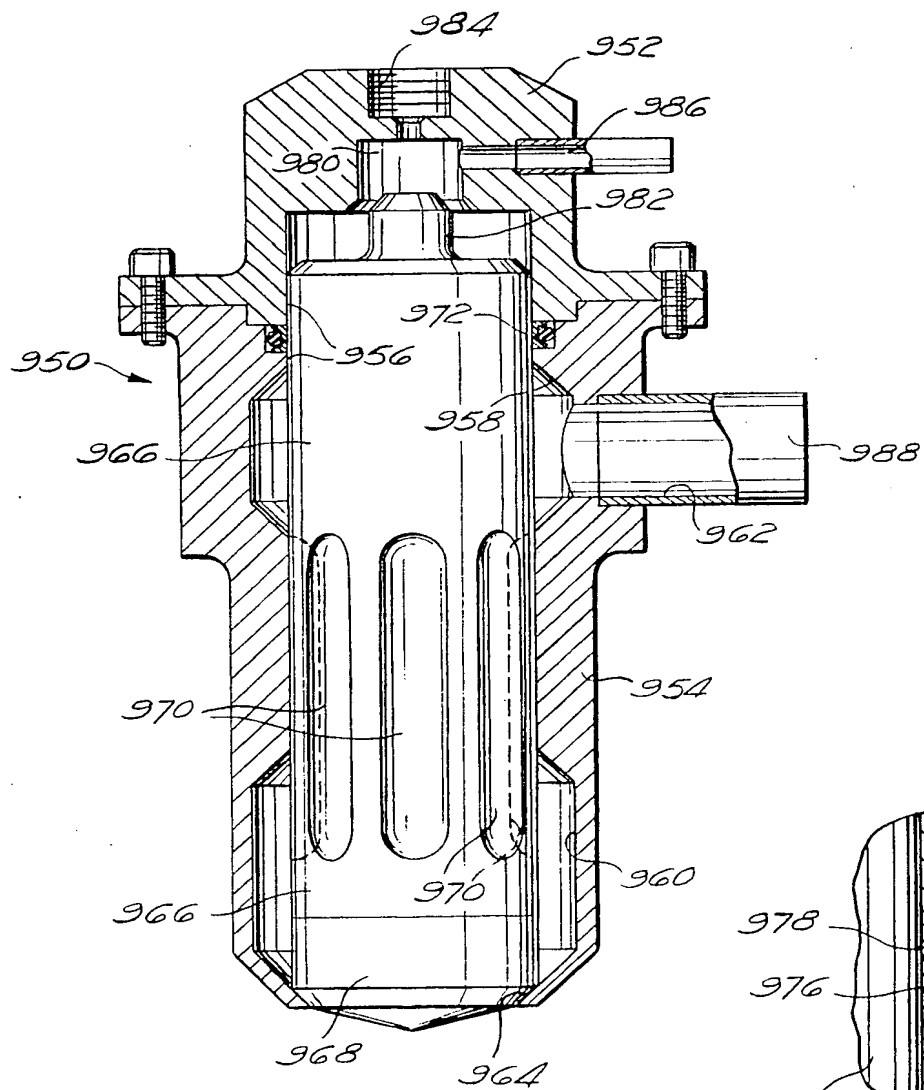
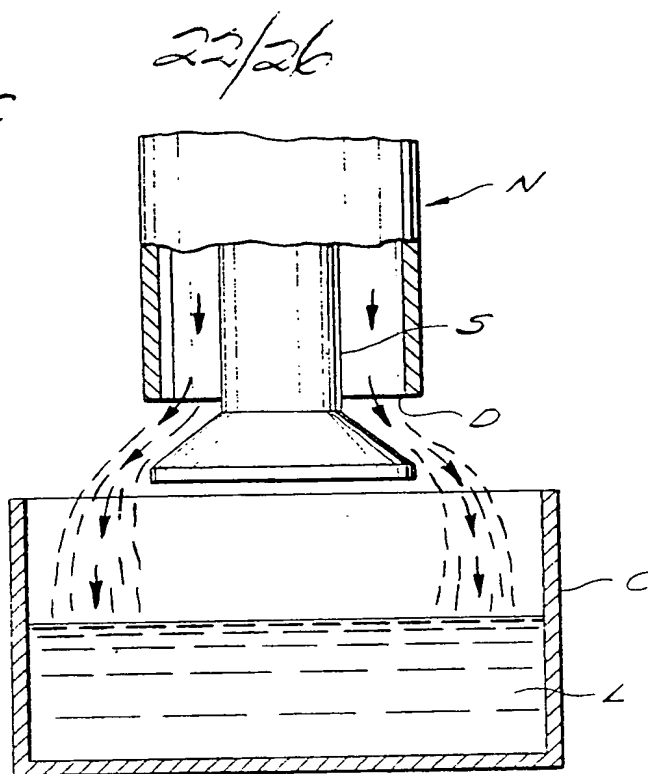
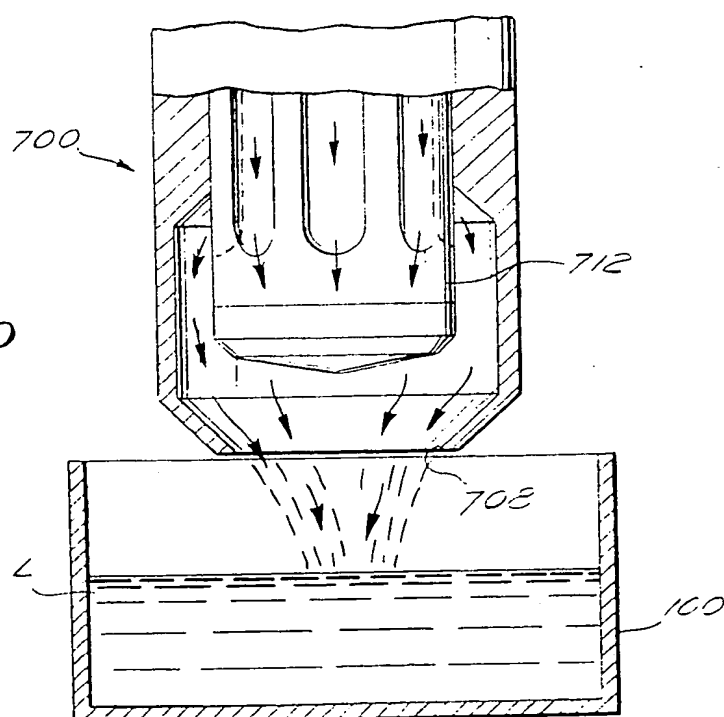
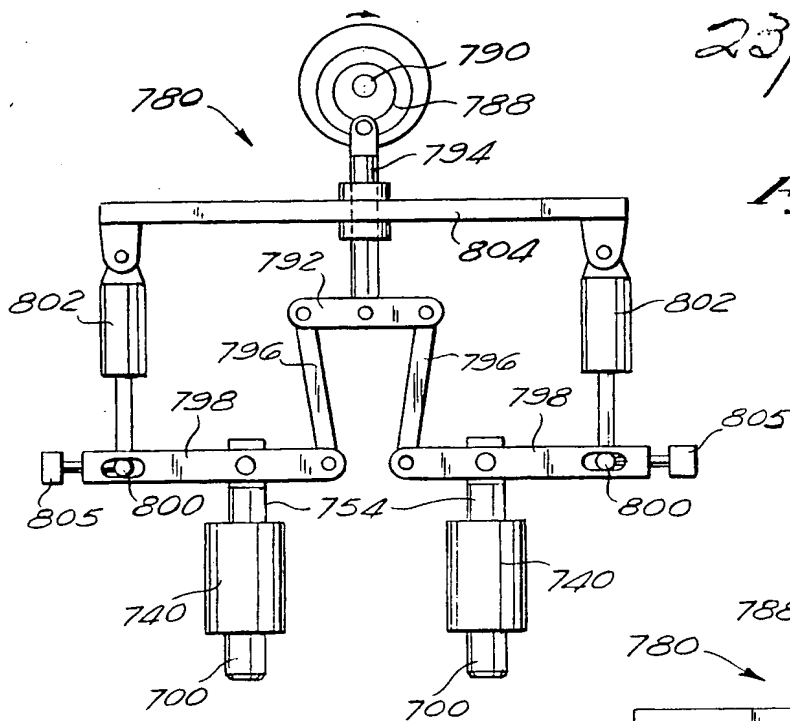
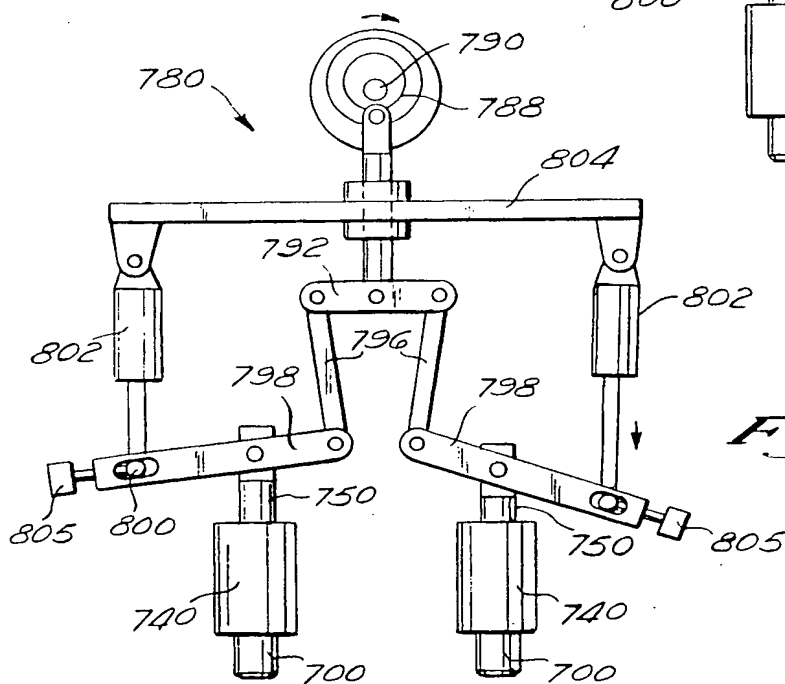
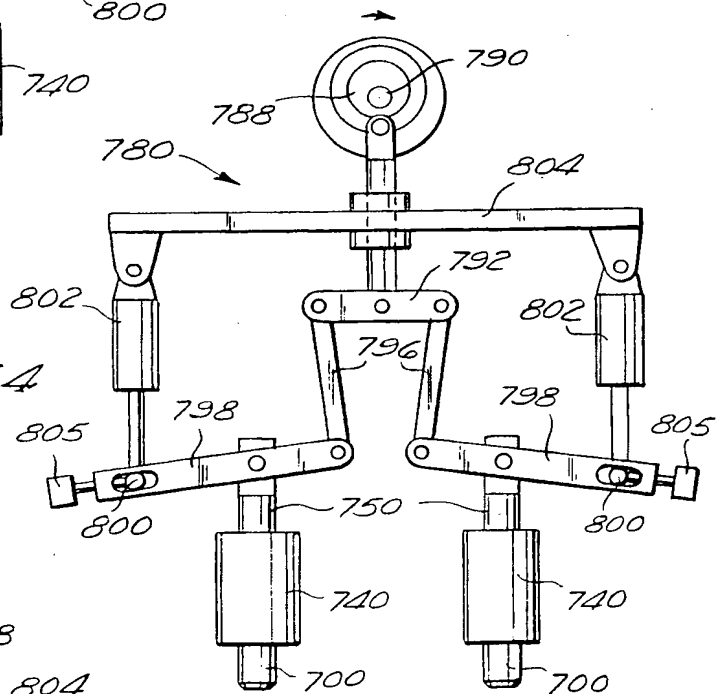
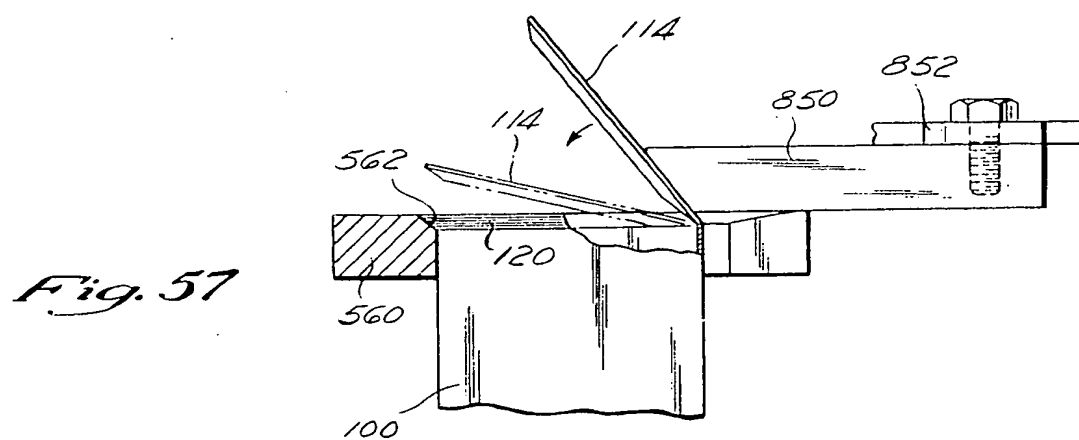
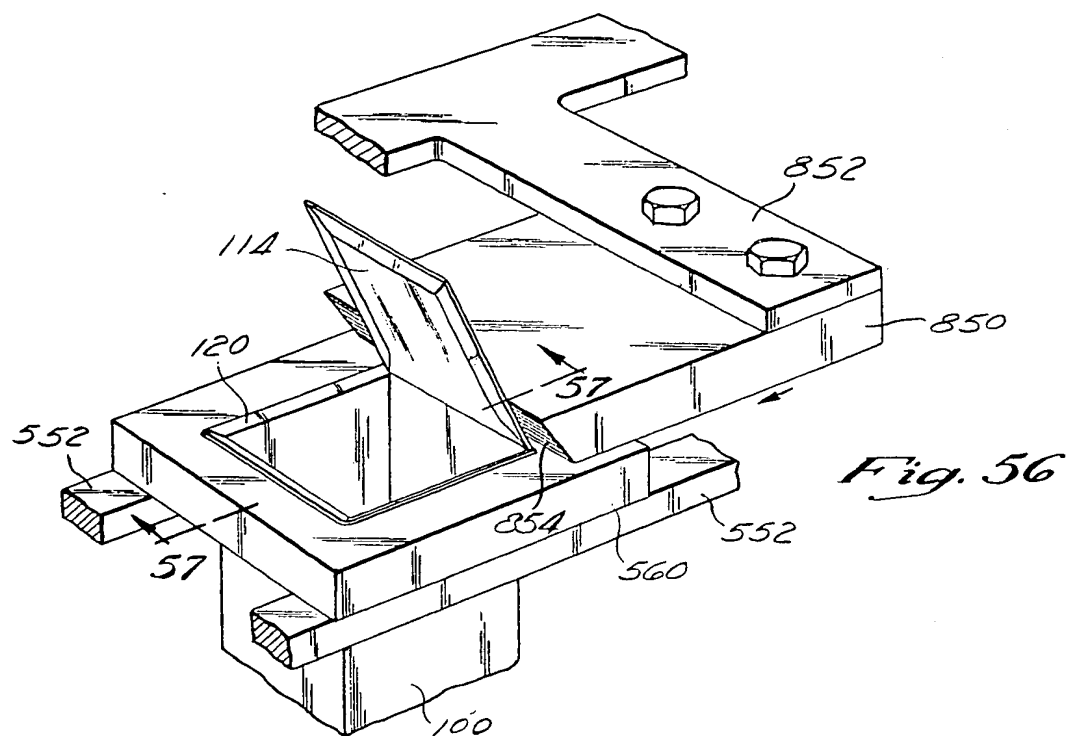
Fig. 52A*Fig. 52B*

Fig. 52C*Fig. 52D*

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*Fig. 53**Fig. 54**Fig. 55*

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Fig. 59

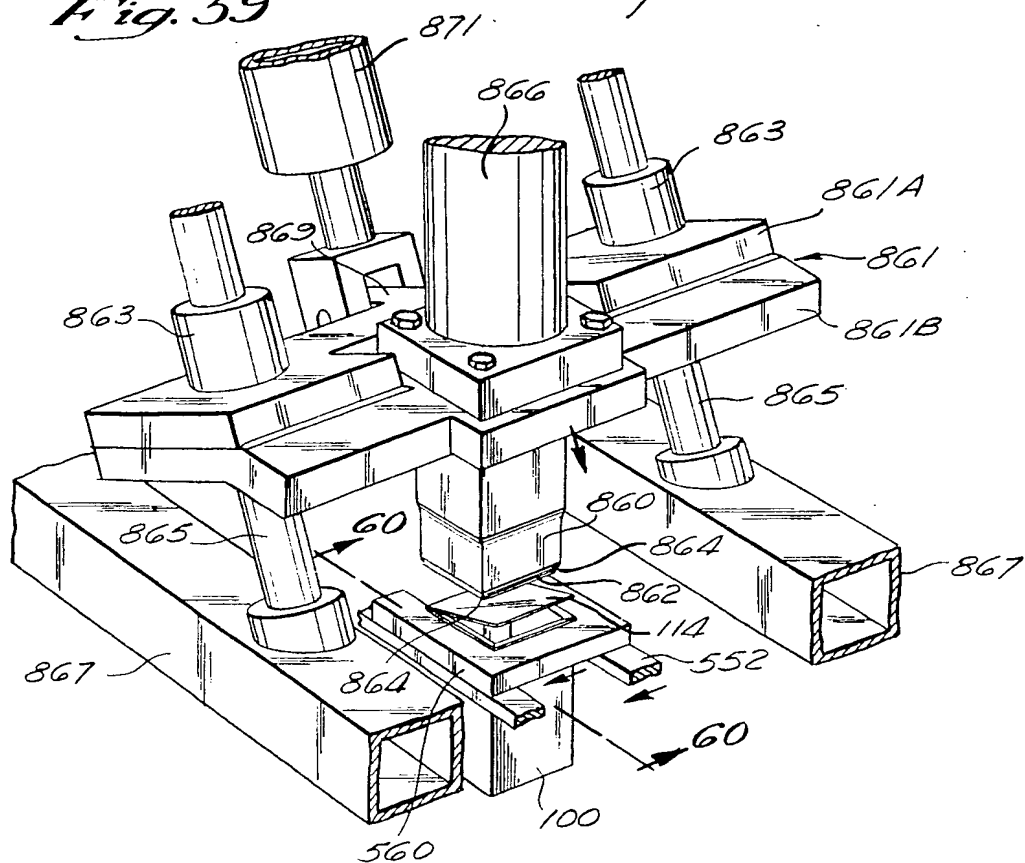


Fig. 60

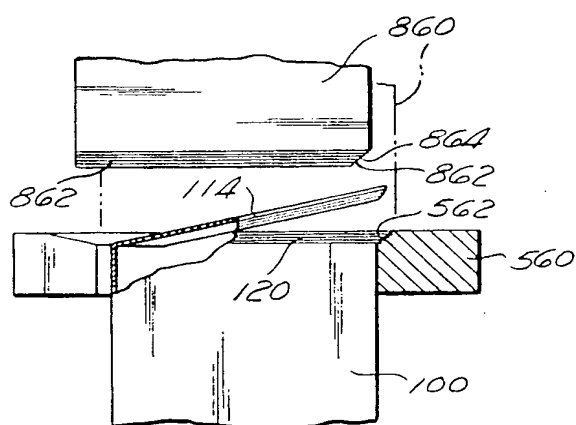
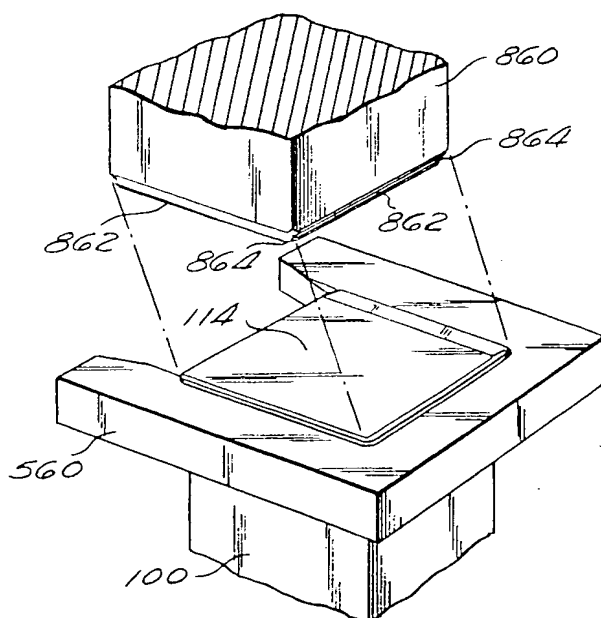


Fig. 58



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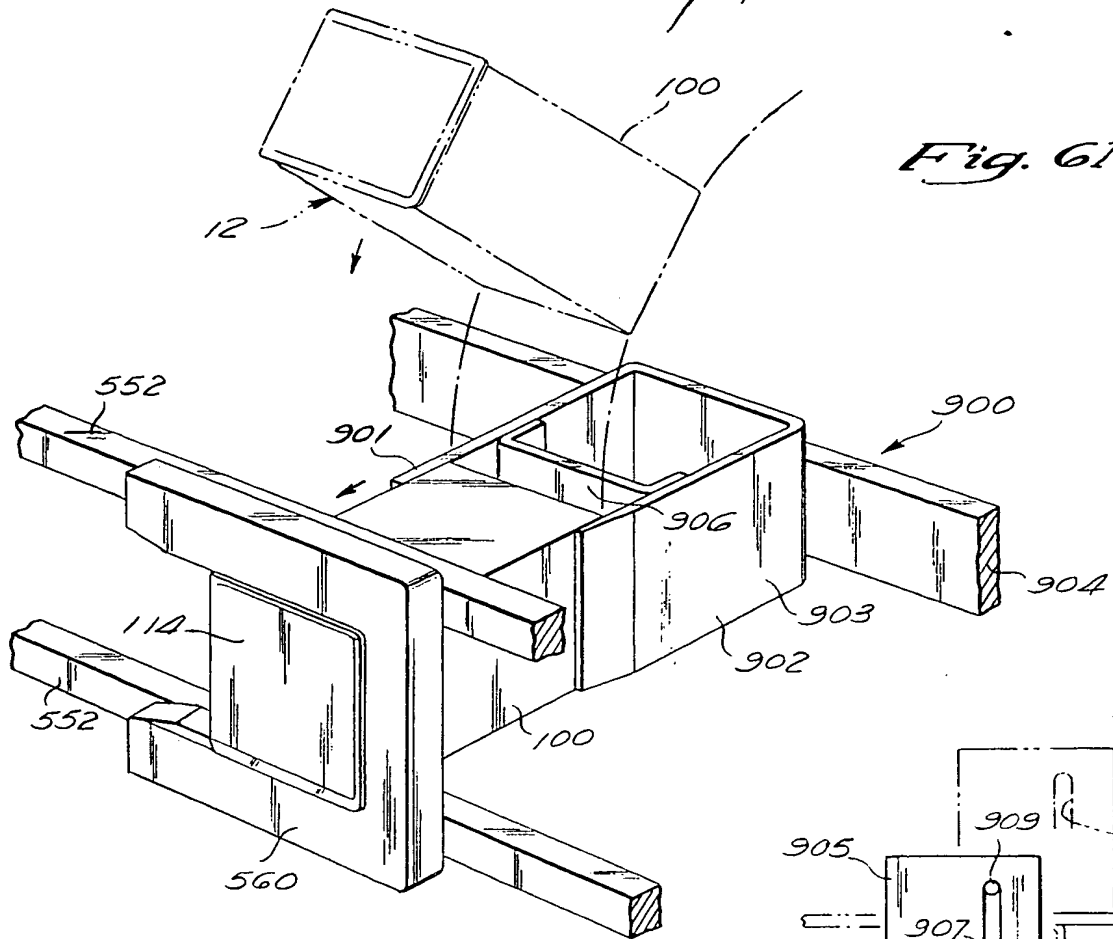


Fig. 61

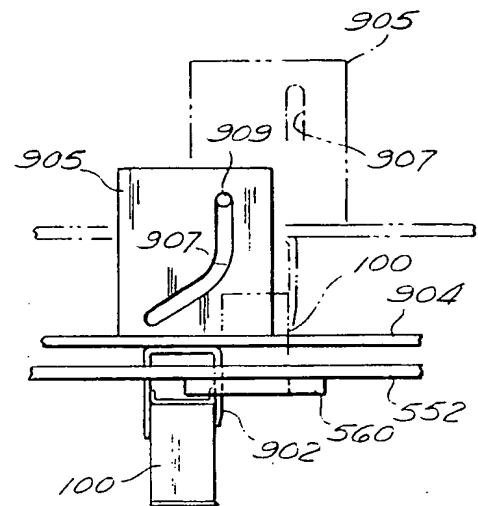


Fig. 63

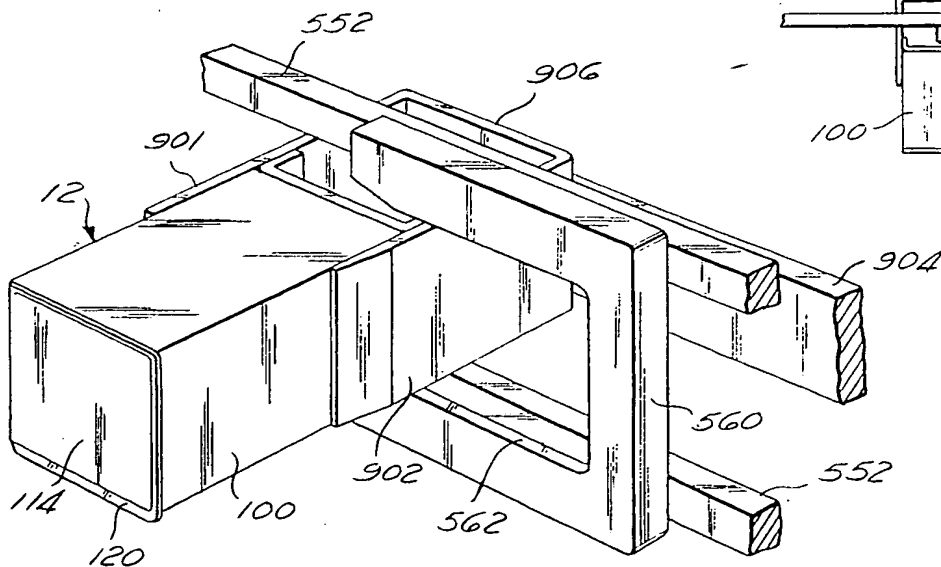


Fig. 62

SPECIFICATION

Method and apparatus for forming a container for liquids

5 The present invention relates to a method and apparatus for forming a container for liquids.

U.S. Patent No. 3,800,677 granted April 2, 1974 to Charles W. Jones and Dwight L. Stetler discloses
10 apparatus for forming, and U.S. Patent No. 3,775,943 granted December 4, 1973 to Charles W. Jones discloses apparatus for filling and sealing, straw-bearing cartons. The apparatus and method of the present invention are intended to form, fill, and seal
15 such cartons. The carton formed by the apparatus and method of the present invention is the type disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 3,749,330 granted July 31 1973 to Charles W. Jones as well as the improvements thereon as shown in U.S. Patent No. 4,011,984
20 granted to Matovich, Jr. issued March 15, 1977, and U.S. Patent Application, Serial No. 911,990, filed June 2, 1978 by Josef J. Buschor, which application is a Continuation-In-Part of U.S. Patent Application, Serial No. 822,500, filed August 8, 1977.

25 Basically, the carton disclosed in each of these patents and applications comprises a rectangular cross-section container formed from a one-piece, substantially T-shaped blank of polyethylene coated paperboard. The carton may be provided on one of
30 its sides with an access flap to the inside of which is attached a straw element. The liquid contents of the carton may be consumed by lifting the access flap, thereby rotating the straw to expose one end of the straw element from which the contents of the carton
35 may be drawn into the mouth, and lowering the other end of the straw into a corner of the carton.

In the formation of the carton by the apparatus shown in U.S. Patent No. 3,800,667, both ends of the carton blank are sealed prior to the filling operation.
40 As disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 3,775,943, the access flap is lifted and the carton filled therethrough, after which the aperture is sealed by the application of a length of tape. U.S. Patent No. 4,037,370 discloses apparatus for closing and sealing the carton wherein
45 the carton is filled from the top of the container and subsequently a cover member is pressed flat down upon the open end of the filled carton and sealed thereto by the melting and cooling of the polyethylene coating on the top of the open-ended
50 carton. Although these prior art methods and apparatus for forming the carton have proven useful in their limited application, they have presented certain cost, space, and production and reliability problems.

In particular, the prior art apparatus for forming
55 the carton has required an extremely large and elongated structure wherein an individual carton blank was formed, filled, and sealed by progression through a series of work stations oriented in an extended production line manner. This large and
60 elongated structure required a considerable amount of space within a plant facility to be devoted to the apparatus, which detracted from the overall efficiency of the device and permitted the installation of the apparatus in only large production facilities.

65 Further, the prior art apparatus typically effected

the formation, filling and sealing of the carton in a serial manner along the production line (i.e., one carton being formed at a time) which, due to the time required for filling and sealing of the carton, limited
70 production output and necessarily increased production costs.

Additionally, due to the elongate nature of the apparatus for forming the carton and the intricate mechanical mechanisms and extended transport
75 mechanisms utilized therein, one or more skilled technicians were required to constantly monitor and adjust the apparatus during operation. Further, the prior art apparatus was incapable of providing a simple and convenient method of accommodating differing sized containers for different production
80 runs. As such, the versatility of the prior art apparatus was severely limited.

It is an object of the present invention to provide apparatus and method of forming a carton blank
85 which are a significant improvement over the apparatus and methods disclosed in the hereinbefore-identified patents and patent applications and significantly eliminate the deficiencies associated with the prior art. The present invention provides a
90 compact apparatus for forming a carton wherein a substantially T-shaped carton blank is provided with a straw element and tape seal, creased into a square tubular configuration about a forming mandrel, sealed along its side and one end by an ultrasonic
95 welding process, pre-formed along its open end by a series of dies, filled with a desired liquid by a two-stage filling process, and subsequently sealed along its open end and automatically ejected from the apparatus.

100 The significant reduction in space and compact nature of the apparatus of the present invention is made possible by the transverse orientation of the mechanism for applying and sealing the straw element to the carton blank, in relation to the
105 remainder of the apparatus of the machine. This transverse orientation allows the carton blanks to be serially provided, that is, one at a time, with the straw element and tape seal and subsequently travel in a plurality (in the preferred embodiment four at a
110 time) through parallel sealing and filling stations. Since the majority of the production time is consumed in the sealing and filling operations, this plural transport of the cartons through the remainder of the apparatus significantly increases production
115 output of the apparatus, without unnecessarily duplicating the preliminary stages which are capable of high speed operation. As such, the apparatus of the present invention may be effectively utilized in smaller plant facilities and provide a high production
120 output which heretofore could not be accomplished by the prior art apparatus, without unnecessary cost increases.

Additionally, the present invention, due to its compact size, significantly reduces the complexities
125 of the transport mechanisms as well as the length of transport of the carton blanks through the apparatus. This reduction of the transport mechanisms substantially reduces the possibility of misalignment of the carton blanks traveling through the apparatus and,
130 as such, provides greater consistency in production

output. Additionally, the present invention, in the preferred embodiment, is provided with a central hydraulic drive system which powers the major transport systems with the individual work stations along the apparatus being pneumatically operated to yield greater reliability for the apparatus.

In the preferred embodiment, the apparatus and method of the present invention provide a novel tape and straw seal mechanism which bonds and seals a straw element and tape length over the aperture formed in one side of the carton blank while the unfolded, T-shaped carton blank is positioned upon a rotating drum. Further, the preferred apparatus and method of the present invention facilitate the end and side sealing of the carton blank upon a rotating crossbar at a single work station without the necessity for transferring the carton blank along plural mandrels for each of the individual end and side sealing operations.

Additionally, the present invention provides a novel yoke or mandrel conveyor transport which positively supports and orients the carton blank as it travels through the pre-form apparatus, filling station, end closure station, and ejector mechanism. Further, a unique positive displacement pump and nozzle assembly utilizing an internally reciprocating spool to provide positive filling and shut-off is disclosed.

These and other features of the present invention will become more apparent upon reference to the accompanying drawings wherein:-

Figure 1 is a perspective view of the apparatus of a preferred embodiment of the present invention illustrating the spacial relationship between the plural work stations (I-VIII) and the direction of travel of the carton blank as it is transported through the apparatus;

Figure 1A is a perspective view of the carton formed by the apparatus and method of the present invention;

Figure 2 is a schematic representation of the processes occurring at each of the Work Stations (I-VIII) and the orientation of the carton blank as it travels through the apparatus of *Figure 1*;

Figure 3 is a plan view of the carton blank of the present invention utilized to form the liquid-tight carton of *Figure 1A*;

Figure 4 is an enlarged perspective view of a portion of the carton blank of *Figure 3* illustrating the location of the tape seal and straw element thereon;

Figure 5 is an enlarged perspective view of the rear end of the apparatus of the present invention taken about lines 5-5 of *Figure 1*;

Figure 6 is an enlarged perspective view of the carton blank feeder mechanism, heat seal and alignment drum, straw inserter mechanism, and tape applicator of the embodiment;

Figure 7 is an elevation view, partially broken away of the carton blank feeder mechanism and heat seal and alignment drum of *Figure 6* depicting a cam and pneumatic drive mechanism for a heater plate;

Figure 8 is an enlarged partial perspective view of the straw inserter mechanism of the embodiment;

Figure 8A is an enlarged cross-sectional view taken about lines 8A-8A of *Figure 8* illustrating the

method in which the individual straw elements are transferred from a straw singulator into the straw feeder mechanism;

Figure 8B is an enlarged perspective view of the straw singulator of the embodiment illustrating an internal biasing roller disposed therein;

Figure 9 is a sectional view of the straw inserter mechanism taken about lines 9-9 of *Figure 8* illustrating the spacial relationship between the straw singulator, straw transport channel, and the alignment drum;

Figure 10 is an enlarged cross-sectional view taken about lines 10-10 of *Figure 9* illustrating the detailed operation of the straw inserter mechanism depositing a straw onto the periphery of the heat seal and alignment drum;

Figure 11 is an enlarged perspective view of the tape dispenser apparatus of the present invention illustrating plural rotating cutter members and their relative orientation with the heat seal and alignment drum;

Figure 12 is a perspective view of a lower rotating cutter member of *Figure 11* illustrating the detailed construction thereof;

Figure 13 is an elevation view of the rotating cutter members of *Figure 11* in a position for initially contacting the length of tape;

Figure 14 is an elevation view of the rotating cutter members of *Figure 11* in a position for shearing or cutting of the tape length;

Figure 15 is a partial perspective view of the heater plate of the heat seal and alignment drum illustrating the detailed construction of the undersurface thereof;

Figure 16 is a perspective view of the stripper wheel mechanism and carton pivot mechanism of the present embodiment;

Figure 17 is an enlarged elevation view of the stripper wheel mechanism of *Figure 16* illustrating the detailed operation thereof;

Figure 18 is a perspective view of the carton pivot mechanism of *Figure 16* illustrating the chain loop transport mechanism;

Figure 19 is a partial elevation view of the stripper wheel mechanism and carton pivot mechanism of the present embodiment showing the initial transfer of the carton blank thereon;

Figure 19A is a partial elevation view identical to *Figure 19* except that it shows the final position of the carton blank after transfer from the stripper wheel mechanism;

Figure 20 is a perspective view of the pre-feeder conveyor and shingling conveyor transport of the present embodiment depicting their relative orientation with forming mandrels and wrapping and creasing mechanisms;

Figure 21 is a perspective view showing the position of a carton blank as it enters the shingling conveyor transport of *Figure 20* and illustrating the manner in which the carton blanks are stacked one beneath the other;

Figure 22 is a perspective view showing the position of an individual carton blank as it enters the wrapping and creasing mechanism, the blank being disposed about the forming mandrel;

Figure 23 is a perspective view of the wrapping and creasing mechanism of the present invention illustrating the detailed construction thereof;

Figure 24 is a perspective view of the wrapping and creasing mechanism of *Figure 23* disposed about the forming mandrel;

Figure 25 is a cross-sectional view of the wrapping and creasing mechanism of the present invention illustrating its initial orientation with the forming mandrel as an individual carton blank enters therein;

Figure 26 is a cross-sectional view of the wrapping and creasing mechanism depicting the initial creasing step of the carton blank about the forming mandrel;

Figure 27 is a cross-sectional view of the wrapping and creasing mechanism illustrating the final creasing step of the carton blank about the forming mandrel;

Figure 28 is a perspective view of the wrapping and creasing mechanism and forming mandrel of the present embodiment depicting the mechanism for transferring the carton blank to the crossbar mandrel of *Figure 30*;

Figure 28A is an enlarged cross-sectional view of the upper corner detail of both the forming mandrel of *Figure 28* and the individual crossbar mandrels of *Figure 30*;

Figure 29 is a perspective view of the carton blank showing its configuration upon being transferred to the crossbar mandrel of *Figure 30*;

Figure 30 is a perspective view of the crossbar mandrel of the present embodiment having a carton blank disposed thereon and illustrating the spacial relationship between an end folding apparatus, side sealing anvil, and end sealing anvil;

Figure 31 is a perspective view of one end of the crossbar mandrel showing the detailed construction of a forming die rigidly mounted thereto;

Figure 32 is a partial perspective view of the carton blank showing its configuration upon completion of its travel through the end folding apparatus of *Figure 30*;

Figure 32A is a schematic illustration of the initial step in the operation of the end folding apparatus of the present embodiment;

Figure 32B is a schematic illustration of the subsequent step in the operation of the folding apparatus of *Figure 32A*;

Figure 32C is a schematic illustration of the final step in the operation of the folding apparatus of *Figure 32A* depicting a sealing tab folded tightly over the end of the crossbar mandrel;

Figure 33 is a perspective view of the crossbar mandrel of the present embodiment having three carton blanks disposed thereon, illustrating the operation of the end folding apparatus and of end sealing apparatus;

Figure 34 is a perspective view of the carton blank disposed upon the crossbar mandrel, illustrating the manner in which an end closure panel is folded over the end of the crossbar mandrel;

Figure 35 is a perspective view of a carton blank rotator mechanism of Work Station IV;

Figure 36 is a partial perspective view of the carton blank rotator mechanism of *Figure 35* illustrating the

manner in which the carton blank is transferred from the crossbar mandrel of *Figure 30* into the fixture of the carton blank rotator mechanism;

Figure 37 is a perspective view of the carton blank rotator mechanism of *Figure 35* illustrating the 90° counter-clockwise rotation of the carton blank within the fixture;

Figure 38 is a perspective view of the carton blank rotator mechanism transferring an individual carton blank from the fixture into a conveyor transport of *Figure 39*;

Figure 39 is a partial perspective view of said conveyor transport of the present embodiment illustrating the detailed construction thereof and the orientation of a side loader mechanism located adjacent one end thereof;

Figure 39A is a cross-sectional view taken about lines A-A of *Figure 39*;

Figure 40 is a perspective view of the conveyor transport and side loader mechanism of *Figure 39* illustrating the operation thereof;

Figure 40A is a perspective view of the side loader mechanism of *Figure 39* having the conveyor transport removed for illustration;

Figure 41 is a cross-sectional view of a pre-form apparatus of Work Station V taken about lines 41-41 of *Figure 1* schematically depicting the three pre-form dies and their relative orientation with the carton blank and the conveyor transport;

Figure 42 is a perspective view of the carton blank showing its configuration upon completion of the first pre-form die operation of *Figure 41*;

Figure 43 is a perspective view of the first preform die being positioned over the carton blank,

Figure 44 is a cross-sectional view of the first pre-form die and its orientation with the carton blank taken about lines 44-44 of *Figure 43*;

Figure 45 is a perspective view of the second preform die of *Figure 41* positioned over the open end of the carton blank, depicting the detailed construction thereof.

Figure 46 is a partial perspective view of the carton blank illustrating the spacial relationship between a creasing pin of *Figure 45* and a forward corner of the blank;

Figure 46A is a perspective view of the carton blank of *Figure 46* illustrating the configuration of a forward corner thereof after extension of a creasing pin;

Figure 47 is a cross-sectional view of the second pre-form die taken about lines 47-47 of *Figure 45* illustrating the movement of operator plates thereon;

Figure 48 is a partial perspective view of the forward corner of the carton blank upon completion of the second pre-form stage;

Figure 49 is a perspective view of the third preform die of *Figure 41*;

Figure 50 is a partial perspective view of the anvil of a conveyor transport illustrating the beveled top edge and relieved corner thereon;

Figure 51 is a partial perspective view of the carton blank illustrating the configuration of the sealing tab after the interaction of the die of *Figure 49* with the anvil of *Figure 50*;

Figure 51A is a perspective view of the carton blank upon completion of the third pre-form stage operation;

Figure 52 is a cross-sectional view of an internal reciprocating spool nozzle and positive displacement metering pump of Work Station VI;

Figure 52A is an alternative form of filler nozzle wherein flow metering is facilitated exclusively by an internal reciprocating spool;

Figure 52B is an enlarged fragmentary view of a stationary cap seal utilized in the filler nozzle of *Figure 52A*;

Figure 52C is a schematic view of a typical prior art nozzle design showing the liquid flow pattern exiting therefrom;

Figure 52D is a schematic view of the internal reciprocating spool nozzle design of *Figures 52* and *52A* depicting the liquid flow pattern exiting therefrom;

Figure 53 is a schematic view of an operating and timing mechanism of the present embodiment connected to the nozzle and pump assembly of *Figure 52*;

Figure 54 is a schematic view of the operating and timing mechanism of *Figure 53* shown in a normal intake stroke;

Figure 55 is a schematic view of the operating and timing mechanism of *Figure 53* illustrating the position of the operating and timing mechanism in a no-fill mode;

Figure 56 is a perspective view of a camming plate mechanism of Work Station VII illustrating its interrelationships with the conveyor transport;

Figure 57 is a cross-sectional view of the camming plate of *Figure 56* taken about lines 57-57 of *Figure 56*;

Figure 58 is a perspective view of the sealing die of Work station VII illustrating the manner in which the open end of the container is sealed to form a liquid-tight carton;

Figure 59 is a perspective view of a support structure and drive mechanism for the sealing die of *Figure 58*;

Figure 60 is a cross-sectional view taken about lines 60-60 *Figure 59*;

Figure 61 is a perspective view of ejector apparatus of Work Station VIII of the present embodiment disposed beneath the conveyor transport adjacent one end thereof;

Figure 62 is a perspective view of the ejector apparatus of *Figure 61* depicted in its final position wherein the carton blank is ejected from the conveyor transport; and

Figure 63 is a plan view of the ejector apparatus of *Figure 61* illustrating the outward travel of the U-shaped fixture.

Referring to *Figure 1* there is shown the apparatus 10 of the present invention which forms a particular type of container for liquids 12 (shown in *Figure 1A*) known generally as a Flip and Sip container (a trademark of Nolex Corporation) and fully disclosed in United States Patent No. 3,749,330, granted July 31, 1973 to Charles W. Jones. As shown in *Figure 1*, the apparatus 10 of the present invention includes a

base or frame 14 which supports a plurality of component systems, each of these systems working in conjunction with each other to produce the sealed container 12 filled with a liquid substance.

For illustration purposes and to show the spacial relationship between the component systems of the present invention, the apparatus 10 has been segregated into a series of Work Stations designated generally by the Numerals I through VIII. By progression through these Work Stations I through VIII, a carton blank 100 initially loaded onto the apparatus 10 at Work Station I is formed into a desired configuration, filled and sealed through a series of operations and is ejected from the apparatus 10 at Work Station VIII.

Referring now to *Figures 1* and *2*, a brief overview and a schematic representation of the processes occurring at each of the Work Stations Numerals I through VIII is illustrated. Note that these figures complement one another, *Figure 2* showing the carton schematically as it progresses through Work Stations I through VIII of *Figure 1*.

At Work Station I (the Straw and Sealing Tape Applicator Station) the carton blanks 100 are loaded upon the apparatus 10 and individually transferred to a rotating drum 146. As the blanks 100 rotate with the drum 146, straw elements (not shown in *Figures 1* and *2*) and tape lengths (not shown in *Figures 1* and *2*) are permanently sealed across apertures 126 formed on the carton blanks 100. Subsequently, each carton blank 100 is removed from the rotating drum 146 by a stripper wheel apparatus 150 which delivers the carton blank 100 to a rotator or pivot mechanism 152 for subsequent entry into the Work Station II.

At Work Station II (Carton Blank Wrapping and Folding Station), the carton blank 100 is transported transversely across the apparatus 10 and individually wrapped and creased into a square, open tube configuration around a forming mandrel (not shown in *Figures 1* and *2*). Subsequently, the carton blank 100 travels to Work Station III (the Seam and End Bonding Station) by being transferred onto a rotating crossbar mandrel 400. Through a series of operations occurring at Work Station III the carton side seam is welded, and one end of the carton blank 100 is closed and bonded together to form a liquid-tight seal.

At Work Station IV (Carton Rotator and Conveyor Transport Station), the carton blank 100 is removed from the crossbar mandrel 400, rotated 90° about its longitudinal axis, and inserted upon a conveyor transport 550 on which the carton blank will remain until being ejected from the apparatus 10. While disposed upon this conveyor 550, the carton blank, supported in a vertical orientation, travels to Work Station V (the End Closure Pre-Form Station) wherein, through a series of three discrete operations, the open end of the carton blank 100 is permanently creased into a configuration suitable for the subsequent end sealing operation.

Having the open end of the carton blank 100

properly creased, the carton blank 100 continues its transport along the conveyor 550 to Work Station VI (Filler Station) wherein the carton is filled with a desired liquid. As represented schematically in Figure 2, the filling of the carton blank 100 is accomplished in a two-stage operation by a pre-fill nozzle which supplies a slight majority of the liquid, and a topper nozzle which accurately fills the carton blank to the desired level with only the latter being adjusted for the two sizes of cartons that may be produced on the apparatus.

Subsequently, the carton blank 100, filled with liquid, travels to Work Station VII (the End Sealing Station) wherein the open end of the carton blank 100 is welded to the square tubular side walls of the container 100. With the liquid sealed within the carton blank 100, the carton 100 travels to Work Station VIII (the Carton Ejector Station) wherein an ejector mechanism (not shown in Figures 1 and 2) removes the carton 100 from the conveyor transport 550 and ejects the same from the end of the apparatus 10.

As will become more apparent from the following disclosure, the apparatus and method of the present invention provide a high volume production apparatus (approximately 240 cartons per minute) and additionally provide significant space, reliability, and consistency improvements over prior art carton forming apparatus.

Carton blank

Referring now to Figure 3, there is shown a carton blank 100 having a generally T-shaped configuration from which the sealed and liquid-tight carton 12 (shown in Figure 1A) of the present invention may be formed. The particular configuration of the carton blank 100 is fully disclosed in a copending U.S. patent application Serial Number 911,990, filed June 2, 1978, by Josef J. Buschor, a continuation-in-part of U.S. Patent Application Serial Number 822,500, filed August 8, 1977, for a Paperboard Carton.

Basically, the carton blank is formed having an elongate central section and a pair of end panels integrally attached adjacent one end thereof. During the forming of the carton, the central section is creased into a square tubular configuration and sealed along one of its edges to form the side walls of the carton with the pair of end panels being subsequently folded over and sealed onto the square tube (in a particular manner to be described below) to provide the end walls of the carton. As will become more apparent, the particular carton blank configuration yields a flat top container which reduces the amount of paper stock used in the container and increases handling and crating processes.

The blank 100 is preferably formed of a paperboard stock having a thickness of approximately fifteen thousandths of an inch and is coated at least on the outside surface thereof (which may be assumed to be the surface seen in Figure 3), and desirably on the inside surface as well, with a substance that will render the paper impervious to liquids intended to be contained within the carton. The coating substance preferably possesses ther-

mal-responsive adhesive properties such that liquid-tight sealing of the components of the blank 100 may be accomplished without the separate application of conventional adhesive substances at the time of blank forming and processing. A thin polyethylene film having an approximate thickness of 1/2 to 1-1/2 mils has been found to include these above properties and is well suited for use in the present invention, especially when the container 12 is used for potable beverages, such as milk.

As may be seen, the blank 100 includes an elongate central section preferably composed of four equal-sized segments 102, 104, 106, and 108, which are separated or delineated by indentation or scoring lines 110. As will be explained in more detail below, these carton segments 102 through 108 will be folded along the scoring lines 110 to form the side walls of a square tubular configuration for the carton 12 of the present invention.

Formed integral with the carton segment 108 are the two end closure panels 112 and 114, which, in the preferred embodiment, are formed in a generally square configuration, due to the equal width of the carton segments 102-108. These end panels 112 and 114 are similar in configuration, except that the end panel 114 includes a pair of sealing flaps 116 extending outboard of the segment 108 along opposite edges thereof. Additionally, end panel 112 is delineated or separated from the carton segment 108 by a score line 118. It will be recognized that various size cartons may be formed by differing the lengths of the carton segments 102 through 108. It is a unique feature of the present invention that cartons of two different lengths (relating to 1/2 pint and 1/3 quart capacity) may be folded, sealed and filled with only minor adjustments to the apparatus 10.

The carton segments 104 and 106 are each additionally provided with a pair of sealing tabs 120, while segment 102 is provided with three of the sealing tabs, the tabs being formed along the free edges of the segments by scoring lines 122. At the intersection of the scoring lines 110 and 122, the sealing tabs 120 preferably include a scored V-shaped notch 124 which, as will become more apparent below, aid in the subsequent liquid-tight sealing of the end panels 112 and 114 to the carton segments 102-108.

The carton blank 100 further includes an elongate aperture 126 formed adjacent the score line 118 and extending partially through the length of the carton segment 108. As shown in Figure 4, and as will be explained in more detail infra, this aperture 126 provides access to the straw element 220 and is overlaid by a length of sealing tape 230A which provides a liquid-tight seal for the carton 100.

Work station I - Straw and Sealing Tape Application

Referring now to Figure 5, the component systems comprising Work Station I (Straw and Sealing Tape Applicator) of the apparatus of the present invention for forming liquid-containing cartons 12 may be described. Work Station I includes, as major subsystems, a conveyor loader 140, a straw inserter 142, a carton blank feeder mechanism 144, a heat seal and alignment drum 146; a tape dispenser 148, a

stripper wheel 150, and a carton blank pivot mechanism 152.

Prior to a detailed description of each of these major component sub-systems, a brief overview of the processes occurring at Work Station I will aid in the complete understanding of the apparatus.

Referring to Figure 5, the carton blanks 100 are initially stacked upon the conveyor loader 140 and travel horizontally toward the rotating alignment drum 146. At the end of the conveyor loader 140, the carton blanks 100 are individually raised in a vertical direction and transferred to the rotating alignment drum 146 by the carton blank feeder mechanism 144. Prior to this transfer of the blank 100 onto the drum 146, the straw inserter 142 loads a straw element 220 (as shown in Figure 6) into a small channel 226 (shown in Figure 10) formed in the periphery of the drum 146 such that, as the blank 100 is transferred to the drum 146, the straw 220 is located directly under the small aperture 126 (Figure 4) formed in the blank 100; i.e., the carton blank 100 (Figure 4) overlays the straw 220.

The straw 220 and carton blank 100 carried by the drum 146 are subsequently rotated past the tape dispenser 148 where a length of polyethylene coated Mylar substrate tape 230A (Figure 4) is positioned on the blank 100 over the aperture 126 and straw 220. As the drum 146 continues its counterclockwise rotation, a heater plate 254, located within the interior of the drum 146, cams outwardly and contacts the carton blank 100, thereby bonding the straw 220 to the tape 230 and concurrently sealing the tape 230 to the carton blank 100 over the aperture 126.

Subsequently, the blank 100 is removed from the drum 146 by stripper wheel 150 which deposits the blank 100 in a horizontal plane. The blank 100 is then delivered by the carton blank pivot mechanism 152 to Work Station II of the apparatus for subsequent wrapping and folding around a forming mandrel.

Thus, as will become more apparent from the discussion below, the carton blank 100, upon completion of its travel through Work Station I, will include a straw 220 and tape seal 230A securely sealed across the aperture 126, as shown in Figure 4.

Referring again to Figure 5, the detailed construction and operation of the conveyor loader 140 is illustrated. The loader 140 preferably includes a pair of elongate conveyor belts 160 typically formed of rubber having a suitable coefficient of friction to prevent surface slippage thereon. These belts 160 are stretched or held taut between two pairs of pulleys 162. Each pair of pulleys is mounted upon a shaft 164, one of which is connected to a drive mechanism (not shown) for rotating the pulleys 162 in a counterclockwise direction (as viewed in Figure 5).

The carton blanks 100 are initially stacked in a row upon the conveyor belts 160 in an inverted, T-shaped orientation such that the edge of the end sections 112 and 114, as well as carton segment 108 as shown in Figure 3), contact the V-belts 160. While positioned on the conveyor belts 160, the vertical orientation of the stack is maintained by a pressure plate 166 which is spring biased in a horizontal

direction to travel along the length of the conveyor belts 160 toward the drum 146. As may be easily recognized, the counterclockwise rotation of the pulley pairs 162 causes the entire stack of carton blanks 100 to move continuously with the conveyor belts toward the carton blank feeder mechanism 144.

The loader 140 additionally includes a pair of L-shaped alignment blocks 167 at one end thereof, located above one of the pulley pairs 164. The vertical distance between the lower surface of the alignment blocks 167 and the upper surface of the conveyor belts 160 is spaced to provide a slight clearance between the edges of the end panels 112 and 114 of the carton blank 100, and the space between the blocks 167 is adjusted to closely receive the sealing tabs 120 of the carton segments 106. Thus, as the carton blank stack 100 moves along the traveling conveyor belt, these alignment blocks 167 precisely register each carton blank 100 upon the conveyor loader 140 for subsequent entry into the carton blank feeder mechanism 144. Additionally, in the preferred embodiment, the outboard alignment block 167 (as viewed from Figure 5) is movably mounted in the direction transverse to the plane of the conveyor 140 such that the space between the blocks 167 may be varied. This variable adjustment accommodates the differing lengths of the carton segments 102-108 (Figure 3) when the apparatus 10 is modified to change from producing one of the 1/2 pint and 1/3 quart capacity cartons 12, to the other.

As the carton blank stack 100 moves beneath the L-shaped alignment blocks 167, each carton blank 100 is sequentially transferred to the heat seal and alignment drum 146 by the carton blank feeder mechanism 144. As may be seen in Figure 6, the carton blank feeder mechanism 144 includes an elevator plate 180 and a pinch roller 182 which cooperate to separate a single carton blank 100 from the stack and transfer the blank 100 onto the heat seal and alignment drum 146.

The elevator plate 180 comprises a generally flat plate having a tapered back wall 184 and a shoulder 186 formed across its width adjacent its leading edge 187. The shoulder 186 has a small step or recess 188 formed adjacent one end thereof, which is sized to receive one of the sealing flaps 116 of the carton blank 100 (as shown in Figure 3). The depth of the shoulder 186 is machined to be slightly less than the thickness of a single carton blank 100 such that the edge of only one carton blank may contact or ride on the shoulder 186 at one time.

Attached to the lower end of the elevator plate 180 is a cammed linkage (not shown) which is connected in a conventional manner to the mechanism used for rotating the drum 146. This cammed linkage transforms the rotary motion of the drum 146 into reciprocating vertical movement of the elevator plate 180 as indicated by the arrow 187 in Figure 6.

The pinch roller 182 is located above the elevator plate 180 and in close juxtaposition to the rotating heat seal and alignment drum 146. The outside diameter of the pinch roller 182 is formed with a reduced diameter section 190 which extends through approximately a 180° arc. As will be explained in more detail below, this reduced diameter

section 190 permits the elevator plate 180 to raise the individual carton blank 100 to a maximum height before the pinch roller 182 transfers the carton blank 100 to the rotating drum 146.

- 5 The pinch roller 182 is mounted to a shaft 192 which is connected in a conventional manner through gears to the drum 146, thereby rotating the pinch roller 182 in a clockwise direction as shown by the arrow in Figure 6. The rotational speed of the
10 pinch roller 182 is proportional to the rotational speed of the drum 146 such that the surface speed of the periphery of the drum 146 and the outside diameter of the pinch roller 182 are equal. The rotation of the pinch roller 182 is synchronized with
15 the reciprocating motion of the elevator plate 180 such that the reduced diameter section 190 of the pinch roller 182 is adjacent the periphery of the drum 146 as the carton blank 100 is raised by the elevator plate 180. As will be explained below, this synchro-
20 nized movement between the pinch rollers 182 and the elevator plate 180 pre-registers the carton blank 100 upon the rotating drum 146.

- Referring now to Figure 7, the detailed operation and interrelationship between the conveyor loader
25 140, the carton blank feeder mechanism 144, and the heat seal and alignment drum 146 may be described. As the carton stack 100 moves along the conveyor loader 140 past the alignment blocks 167, the elevator plate 180 reciprocates downward, whereby
30 the lower edge of the shoulder 186 travels below the lower edge of the leading carton blank 100 indicated by the numeral 200.

- In this position, the travel of the conveyor loader 140 causes the leading individual carton blank 100A
35 to be pushed off the conveyor loader 140 and onto the shoulder 186 of the elevator plate 180. Since the width of the shoulder 186 is slightly less than the thickness of the carton blank 100A, and the elevator plate reciprocates closely against the back surface of
40 the alignment block 167, only a single carton blank 100A is removed from the stack 100 and elevated toward the pinch roller 182. Thus, as the single blank 100A is raised, it slides against the next adjacent blank, which is held stationary by the alignment
45 blocks 167.

- As shown in Figure 7, the elevator plate 180 raises the individual carton blank 100A between the rotating drum 146 and the pinch roller 182 to a height wherein the leading edge of the carton blank 100A is
50 slightly above the tangency point between the drum 146 and pinch roller 182. As previously mentioned and clearly shown in Figure 7, during this upward travel of the carton blank 100A and elevator plate 180, the reduced diameter section 190 of the pinch
55 roller 182 faces the periphery of the drum 146 and is spaced therefrom to provide a small gap 202 into which the leading edge of the carton blank 100A may be received.

- Thus, as may be recognized, this gap 202 allows
60 the carton blank 100A to ride between the rotating drum 146 and rotating pinch roller 182, and remain stationary therebetween until the carton blank 100A is contacted by the leading edge 204 of the larger diameter portion of the pinch roller 182. The appli-
65 cant has discovered that by allowing the carton

blank 100 to remain momentarily stationary in this raised position, the carton blank is pre-registered to within 1/32 of an inch of its proper location on the rotating drum 146.

- 70 With the carton blank 100A raised to the position illustrated in Figure 7, the continued clockwise rotation of the pinch roller 182 causes the leading edge 204 of its larger diameter portion to contact the surface of the carton blank 100A. Upon contact
75 therewith, the gap 202 is significantly narrowed, such that the carton blank 100A is pinched and propelled upward between the periphery of the drum 146 and pinch roller 182. Since the relative surface speeds of the rotating drum 146 and pinch
80 roller 182 are equal, the carton blank 100A is raised uniformly upward without slippage and removed from the elevator plate 180.

- To facilitate the transfer of the carton blank 100A to the periphery of the drum 146, the peripheral
85 surface of the drum 146 is provided with a series of vacuum orifices 147 (shown in Figure 11) preferably arranged in a patterned array within the area covered by the carton blank 100A and connected by a conventional valving and conduit system (not
90 shown) communicating with a remotely located vacuum source (not shown). These apertures 147 act upon the inside surface of the carbon blank 100A to effectively maintain the carton blank 100A pressed against the periphery of the drum 146. As may be
95 recognized, since the outside diameter of the drum 146 is great in relation to the thickness of the carton blank 100A, the curvature of the carton blank 100A upon the drum 146 is insufficient to cause creasing or permanent distortion of the carton blank 100A.

- To insure the final proper alignment and registra-
100 tion of the carton blank 100A upon the drum 146, a pair of registration tabs 206 are provided along both outside edges of the drum 146. The peripheral spacing between the tabs 206 is adjusted to be
105 slightly greater than the width of the end sections 114 and 112, respectively, of the carton blank 100A (as shown in Figure 3). Further, the inside edge of each of the registration tabs 206 is preferably provided with a chamfer which aids in the insertion
110 of the end closure panels 114 and 112 after transfer of the carton blank 100A from the carton blank feeder mechanism 144 to the drum 146.

- Thus, as the carbon blank 100A is pinched be-
115 tween the roller 182 and drum 146 and applied against the periphery of the drum 146, these registration tabs 206 receive the end closure panels 114 and 112, respectively, of the carton blank 100A at a point adjacent the gap 202. Upon entry of the end closure panels 114 and 112 into the registration tabs
120 206, any minor variances in the location of the carton blank 100 upon the drum 146 will be eliminated by the tight fit of the end panels 114 and 112 within the registration tabs 206 which cause the carton blank to float along the periphery of the drum 146 into its
125 proper position. Subsequently, vacuum is applied to the vacuum orifices 147 (shown in Figure 11) to maintain the carton blank 100 in its aligned position upon the periphery of the drum 146.

- Thus, from the above, it may be recognized that
130 the carton blank feeder mechanism 144 effectively

transfers the carton blank 100 from the conveyor loader 140 to an accurately aligned position on the heat sealing and alignment drum 146.

As previously mentioned, prior to the transfer of
5 the carton blank 100 onto the rotating drum 146, the plastic straw element 220 (preferably formed of polyethylene) must be placed upon the periphery of the drum 146, and in the preferred embodiment is accomplished by a straw inserter mechanism 142.
10 Referring jointly to Figures 5 and 8, the straw inserter 142 is rigidly mounted adjacent the outer surface of the drum 146 and maintained in a stationary position while the drum 146 rotates in a counterclockwise direction. The straw inserter 142 in
15 this instance is composed of a straw storage hopper 222, a separator or singulator 223, and a feeder or transport mechanism 224. A plurality of straw elements 220 are stored within the hopper 222 and are oriented such that the length of each straw element
20 220 is parallel to the axis of rotation of the drum 146. At its lower end, the hopper 222 includes an elongate opening 221 (shown in Figure 8A) the width of which is slightly greater than the outside diameter of the straw element 220. As will be explained in more
25 detail below, this opening 221 permits a single straw element 220 to be transferred from the singulator 223 to the transport or feeder mechanism 224.

As shown in Figures 8 and 8A, the singulator 223 is formed in a cylindrical drum configuration, having
30 an outer shell 201 which includes a plurality of grooves 225 of semi-circular section symmetrically spaced along its outer periphery. The width of the grooves 225 is preferably formed slightly greater than the diameter of the straw element 220 such that
35 a single straw element 220 may be carried therein.

Disposed within the interior of the shell 201 and positioned adjacent its lower edge (as shown in Figure 8A) are a pair of roller members 209 which are
40 each mounted for rotation about a shaft 211. The shafts 211 are vertically spaced from the axis of the outer shell 201 and extend outboard of the singulator 223 being supported at one end by a pivot arm 203 (Figure 8B). The roller members 209 are free to rotate about the shaft 211 (in a direction indicated by
45 the arrow in Figure 8A) while the shaft 211 is spring loaded as by way of springs 205 in a downward direction to continuously bias the roller members 209 adjacent the lower end of the shell 201. In this
50 instance, the inside diameter of the shell 201 includes a pair of annular recesses 227B which extend part-way into the grooves 225 forming plural apertures 207. These recesses 227B provide a race or path which aligns the roller members 209 with the shell 201 while the apertures 207 permits the rollers
55 to enter substantially within the interior of the grooves 225.

As shown in Figure 8A, by this particular arrangement, the roller members 209 each selectively contact the portion of each straw element 220
60 residing directly above the apertures 207 formed by the annular recesses 227B thereby causing the straw element 220 to be axially pre-stressed into an oval configuration adjacent the lower end of the hopper 222. As will be explained in more detail below, this
65 pre-stressing of the straw element 220 is utilized to

provide a self-propelling means for transferring the straw element 220 into the straw feeder or transport mechanism 224.

Referring to Figure 8, it may be seen that the
70 singulator 223 is mounted as by way of a center web (not shown) upon a shaft 227 which is journaled to the walls of the hopper 222 for movement in a clockwise direction as indicated by the arrow in Figure 8. The shaft 227 mounts a ratchet mechanism
75 229 adjacent one end thereof which is activated by a hydraulic or pneumatic actuator 231. This hydraulic or pneumatic actuator 231 is connected to an external pressure source (not shown) and is regulated by a valve (not shown) to periodically rotate
80 the shaft 227 and thus the singulator 223 through an angle equal to the spacing between adjacent grooves 225 formed along its periphery. As will be recognized, during this periodic rotation, a single straw element 220 travels toward the opening 221
85 formed in the bottom of a hopper 222 for deposition into the feeder mechanism 224.

Disposed beneath and positioned tangent to the singulator 223 is a feeder mechanism 224 which rotates on a shaft 223A connected in a conventional
90 geared manner to the drive mechanism (not shown) of the rotating heat seal and alignment drum 146. The feeder mechanism 224 in this instance includes an enlarged cylindrical end section 235 having a groove 237 formed axially along its periphery.
95 Disposed within the groove 237 and reciprocable throughout the length thereof, is an ejector pin 253 which is connected to a mechanical linkage (not shown) contained within the cylindrical head 235 and synchronized with the rotation of the heat seal and alignment drum 146. As will be explained in
100 more detail below, the ejector pin 253 transfers an individual straw element 220 toward the periphery of the drum 146 during operation.

An elongate riser 239 is rigidly attached to the
105 shaft 233a and extends from the inboard end of the cylinder 235 to a position substantially beneath the periphery of the heat seal and alignment drum 146 (as better shown in Figure 9). The top surface of the riser 239 is provided with a channel 241 having a square tubular configuration, the interior cross-sectional area of which is slightly greater than that of a single straw element 220. As shown in Figures 8 and 9, this channel member 241 is aligned with the
110 groove 237 formed in the cylindrical end portion 235 such that a straw element 220 may be transferred axially throughout the length of the groove 237 and channel member 241. In the present embodiment, the channel member 241 has a sufficient length to accommodate three straw elements 220.

The extreme inward end of the riser 239 and channel member 241 is provided with a pair of
120 access slots 243 which extend radially inward toward the shaft 233A to a depth slightly below the lower surface of the channel member 241. Further, the top portion of the channel member 241 is removed adjacent these slots 243 which, as will be recognized below, facilitates the removal of the straw element from the channel member 241. As
125 best shown in Figures 9 and 10, these slots 243 are aligned with a pair of camming fingers 245 which are

rigidly attached to the frame (not shown) of apparatus 10 and juxtapose the periphery of the heat seal and alignment drum 146. These camming fingers 245 contact the lower surface of the straw element 220 contained within the channel member 241, causing the straw element 220 to be transferred to the periphery of the rotating drum 146 as the feeder mechanism 224 rotates in a clockwise direction as indicated by the arrow in Figure 8.

10 The periphery of the heat seal and alignment drum 146 includes an elongate groove or channel 226 which extends partially across the periphery of the hub 146 (as indicated by the dotted line in Figure 9). The depth of this groove 226 is slightly less than the

15 diameter of the straw element 220 such that, upon insertion of the straw element 220 into the aperture 226, a small portion of the diameter of the straw element 220 protrudes above the periphery of the drum 146.

20 In the present embodiment, the groove 226 is formed in an insert member 247 which is attached to and resides within the interior of the periphery of the heat seal and alignment drum 146. As shown, a raised portion 251 of the insert member is flush

25 mounted to the drum 146 and forms a portion of the outer periphery of the rotating drum 146. Additionally, to maintain the straw element 220 within the groove 226 until the carton blank 100 is applied to the drum 146 (in a manner previously described), a

30 shroud 249 (Figure 10) is provided which is minimally spaced from the outer periphery of the drum 146 and extends between the upper end of the camming fingers 245 to just below the gap formed between the drum 146 and pinch roller 182 (Figure 7).

35 In operation, as the heat seal and alignment drum 146 rotates in a counterclockwise direction (as indicated by the arrow in Figure 8), the singulator 223 is rotated through a short distance (in a direction indicated by the arrow thereon), by the actuation of

40 the hydraulic or pneumatic cylinder 231. This rotation of the singulator 223 causes a single straw element 220A, initially located at approximately a five o'clock position upon the singulator 223 (as indicated in Figure 8A), to travel toward the opening

45 221 of the hopper 222 to an approximate six o'clock position. During this rotational travel, the portion of the straw element 220A residing immediately above the apertures 207 formed by the annular recesses 227B, contacts the periphery of the roller members

50 209 and is tightly pressed or squeezed against the lower wall of the hopper 222 by the springs 205. This squeezing causes the straw element 220A to deform into a pre-stressed oval configuration represented by the numeral 220B in Figure 8A.

55 In synchronism, with the rotation of the singulator 223, the feeder mechanism 224 continuously rotates in a clockwise direction (as indicated by the arrow in Figure 8A) so that the groove 237 formed on the cylinder 235 of the feeder mechanism 224 aligns or

60 registers with the opening 221 of the hopper 222 and the groove 225B of the singulator 223. This alignment, which, due to the continuous rotation of the feeder mechanism 224, is maintained for only an instant of time, causes the single straw element 220B

65 to exit the groove 225B of the singulator 223 (in a

direction indicated by the phantom lined arrow in Figure 8A) and enter the groove 237 formed in the feeder mechanism 224.

Due to the downward biasing force of the springs 205 as well as the pre-stressed oval configuration of the straw element 220B, and the high memory properties of the polyethylene straw element material, it will be recognized that the transfer between the grooves 225B and 237 occurs almost instantaneously, with the straw element 220B in effect being self-propelled or shot from the singulator 223 into the groove 237.

Subsequent to this transfer of the straw element 220B, the feeder mechanism 224 continues its rotation about the shaft 233 in a clockwise direction as indicated by the arrow in Figure 8, so that, due to the groove 237 being formed slightly greater than the diameter of the straw element 220B, the straw element 220B may return to its initial unstressed cylindrical configuration. During this rotation, a shroud substantially surrounding the periphery of the cylindrical portion 235 of the feeder mechanism 224, maintains the straw element 220 within the groove 237.

As the groove 237 and straw element 220 rotate to approximately the nine o'clock position, as viewed in Figure 8, the ejector pin 253 rapidly travels throughout the length of the groove 237, thereby causing the straw element 220 contained therein to enter into the channel member 241. The channel member 241 which, as previously mentioned, is formed to accommodate three straw elements, has been preloaded with two straw elements 220 during the previous two reciprocations of the ejector pin 253. Therefore, this transfer of the straw element 220 from the groove 237, advances the outer-most straw element to reside adjacent the extreme end of the channel 241.

Subsequently, the continued rotation of the feeder mechanism 224 causes the leading edge of the camming fingers 245 to enter into the slots 243 formed in the riser 239 (as shown in Figure 10), and contact the lower surface of the straw element 220. Upon contact with the fingers 245, due to the continued rotation of the feeder mechanism 224, the straw 220 cams along the concave upper surface of the camming fingers 245 and travels vertically upward toward the periphery of the drum 146.

The rotation of the drum 146 and the feeder mechanism 224 are synchronized such that, as the feeder mechanism 224 rotates past the camming fingers 245, the groove 226 formed along the periphery of the drum 146 is aligned with the channel 241. Thus, continued rotation of the feeder mechanism 224 causes the straw element 220 contained within the channel 241 to enter into the groove 226 formed along the periphery of the drum 146. Once inserted in the channel 226, the straw element 220 is maintained therein by the shroud 249 (as shown in Figure 10) which is minimally spaced from the outer periphery of the drum 146 and extends from the upper end of the camming fingers 245 to just below the gap formed between the drum 146 and pinch roller 182.

After the actuation of the feeder pin 253, during

which the single straw element 220 is transferred into the channel member 241, the feeder pin 253 rapidly reciprocates back to its initial position as shown in Figure 8 so that the channel 237 is free to receive an additional straw element 220 from the singulator 223, and repeat the cycle previously described. Thus, from the above, it will be recognized that the straw inserter 142 of the present invention provides a simple yet effective mechanism for transferring a series of single straw elements 220 from the hopper 222 onto the periphery of the drum 146.

Subsequent to the insertion of the straw element 220 into the channel 226, the drum 146 continues its counterclockwise rotation to the location where the carton blank 100 is transferred onto the hub 146 by the carton blank feeder mechanism 144 in the manner previously described. The location of the channel 226 on the periphery of the drum 146 is designed such that, when the carton blank 100 is transferred onto the drum 146, the channel 226 and straw element 220 is disposed beneath the aperture 126 of the carton element 100 as shown in Figure 4. Thus, by the operation of the straw inserter 142 and the carton blank feeder mechanism 144, the carton blank 100 and straw element 220 are transferred onto the drum 146 in a proper relative orientation for the subsequent tape length heat bonding and sealing operation.

Continued rotation of the drum 146 causes the straw element 220 and carton blank 100 to pass under the tape dispenser unit 148 wherein a length of tape 230A is deposited over the aperture 126 of the carton blank 100 (as shown in Figure 4).

Referring to Figure 5, the tape dispenser mechanism 148 includes the following components: a length of tape 230, a pair of tape capstans 231 and 232, a tape guide 233, a back pressure chamber 234, and a supply spool 236. The supply spool 236 is rotatably mounted to the housing 238 and stores the length of tape 230 which, in the preferred embodiment, is formed of a polyethylene coated Mylar material. As shown, from the supply spool 236, the tape 230 is threaded through the tape guide 233 and disposed between the two tape capstans 231 and 232. In operation, the capstans 231 and 232 simultaneously contact the tape length 230, whereby the tape length 230 is cut and transferred to the carton blank 100 disposed upon the rotating heat seal and alignment drum 146.

Referring now to Figure 11, the detailed construction and operation of the tape dispenser 148 may be described. As will be recognized, for purposes of illustration, the supply spool 236 and the vacuum chamber 234 have been removed from the apparatus in this figure. As shown, the tape capstans 231 and 232 are each mounted on a drive shaft 235 and 237, respectively, which are connected, as by a gear train, to the drum 146 to rotate in opposed directions (as indicated by the arrows in Figure 11) in synchronism with the rotating heat seal and alignment drum 146.

The upper tape capstan 231 includes a substantially L-shaped housing 239 having a radially extending leg 241. The capstan 235 additionally includes a

central cavity 243 into which is mounted a pressure plate 245 having a convex surface and a knife edge assembly 247.

The pressure plate 245 is preferably formed having a concave outer surface which includes a series of serrations or a knurl finish thereon. As better shown in Figure 13, the pressure plate 245 is mounted within the cavity 243 adjacent the leg 241 of the housing 239 and is retained in position by a spring 246 compressed between the pressure plate 245 and housing 239. This spring 246 biases the pressure plate 245 in a radially outward direction, yet permits inward movement of the pressure plate 245 in response to compression forces exerted on the top surface of the pressure plate 245.

A knife edge assembly 247 additionally resides within the cavity 243 and includes an L-shaped mounting member 251 onto which a blade 253 is securely mounted. As shown in Figure 13, the L-shaped mounting member 251 is pivotally attached to the housing 239 by a self-aligning pin 249 which aligns the blade 253 with the other capstan 232 during rotation to ensure that the tape 230 is sheared completely across its width. Further, the mounting member 251 and blade 253 are biased in a counterclockwise direction against the housing 239 by a pair of springs 255. As such, the blade 253 is constantly urged against the pressure plate 245 and aligned with the other capstan 232 as the pressure plate reciprocates radially inward and outward within the cavity 243.

Referring to Figure 12, it may be seen that the lower tape capstan 232 has a generally semi-circular configuration and includes a boss or land 257 which extends radially outward therefrom. As with the pressure plate 245 of the upper tape capstan 231, the top surface of the land 257 is formed in a convex configuration, the radius of which is complementary to that of the pressure plate 245 of the upper tape capstan 231. In addition, the land 257 includes a knife edge 254 adjacent one side thereof which aligns with the blade 253 of the upper capstan 231 during operation to shear the tape length 230 in a manner to be described below. The top surface of the land 257 includes a plurality of apertures 259 extending across the length thereof which are connected to an externally located vacuum source (not shown). As will become more apparent from the following description, the vacuum at these apertures 259 holds the tape length 230 against the land 257 for subsequent deposition upon the periphery of the drum 146.

As shown in Figure 11, the tape capstans 231 and 232 are preferably positioned in a substantially vertical orientation and are spaced from one another such that, during their opposed rotation, the convex surfaces of the pressure plate 245 and land 257 tangentially contact one another. Additionally, the lower tape capstan 232 is mounted in close juxtaposition to the rotating drum 146 such that the outer surface of the land section 257 is minimally spaced from the periphery of the rotating drum 146 during rotation.

The tape guide 233 is composed of a picture-frame like support structure 261 having a pair of tapered,

5 mating plates 263 and 265 which are rigidly mounted along the bottom surface of the frame 261 and pivotally mounted adjacent the median of the frame 261, respectively. The support frame 261 is additionally pivotally attached intermediate its length to a bracket 269 which is rigidly connected to the frame or housing 238.

10 A hydraulic or pneumatic operator 271 attached to the upper end of the frame 261 is provided to adjust the orientation of the plate members 263 and 265 relative the tape capstans 231 and 232. As will be recognized, by energizing the operator 271, the support frame pivots in a counterclockwise direction to position the plates 263, 265 proximal the two tape capstans 231 and 232 as illustrated in Figure 13.

15 The lower surface of the upper plate member 265 is formed having a shoulder 267 which extends throughout its width. This shoulder 267 forms, in effect, a one-way wedge which permits the upper plate 265 to pivot about its upper pivot axis toward the tape capstans 231 and 232, yet prevents any pivotal movement of the top plate member 265 in the opposite direction therefrom. Further, the top plate member 265 is constantly urged in the direction away from the capstans 231 and 232 by a spring 273 which extends from the rear surface of the top plate member 265 to the rigid support bracket 269. With the tape length 230 threaded between the plate members 265 and 263, the downward pivotal movement of the plate 265 is constrained by the lower plate 263 so that the tape length 230 is permitted to travel only in the direction toward the tape capstans 231 and 232, as indicated by the arrow in Figure 11.

20 During the initial start-up procedure of the apparatus 10, the hydraulic actuator 271 is energized, thereby pivoting the plate members 263 and 265 closely adjacent the tape capstans 231 and 232 to the position indicated in Figure 13. As shown, in this initial position, the tape length 230 preferably extends slightly beyond the ends of the plate members 265 and 263 and resides along a plane tangent between the tape capstans 231 and 232.

25 As the tape capstans 231 and 232 rotate in their opposed directions as indicated by the arrows in Figure 13, the leading edges of the land 257 and the pressure plate 245 simultaneously contact opposite sides of the tape length 230, thereby tightly pinching the tape length 230 against the knurled top surface of the pressure plate 245.

30 The continued rotation of the tape capstans 231 and 232 causes the tape length 230 to be advanced from the tape guide 233 across the width of the concave surface of the land 257. During this rotation, the pinching pressure exerted by the land 257 against the top surface of the pressure plate 245 causes the pressure plate 245 to reciprocate in a radially inward direction, overcoming the opposing force exerted by the biasing spring 246. During this operation, the tape length 230 is advanced from the tape guide 233 while the pressure plate 245 reciprocates within the cavity 243 of the rotating member 231.

35 As shown in Figure 14, with the continued opposed rotation of the tape capstans 231 and 232, the pressure plate 245 reciprocates radially inward

beyond the top edge of the blade 253. Additionally, during this rotation, a pair of tabs 248 which protrude radially outward from the distal edge of the blade 253 contact the trailing edge of the knife edge 254 causing the blade 253 to pivot slightly backwards against the spring 255. This slight backwards pivoting aligns the cutting blade 253 with the knife edge 254 so that the blade 253 shears the tape length 230 adjacent the trailing edge of the land section 257 of the lower tape capstan 232. The sheared length of tape 230A (as shown in Figure 14) is subsequently maintained on the outer surface of the land 257 of the lower tape capstan 232 during continued rotation of the tape capstans 231 and 232 by the vacuum applied through the vacuum apertures 259 (shown in Figure 12).

40 The vacuum is maintained during the continued rotation of the capstan 232 until approximately the seven o'clock position (as viewed from Figure 14), at which point the tape length is proximal the periphery of the drum 146 (shown in Figure 11). In this seven o'clock position, the vacuum to the vacuum ports 259 of the lower tape capstan 232 is discontinued, so that the vacuum ports 147 located on the periphery of the heat seal and alignment drum 146 and acting through the aperture 126 of the carton blank 100 pull the tape length 230A from the surface of the land section 257 tightly against the periphery of the drum 146.

45 Referring to Figure 4, the approximate size and orientation of the tape length 230A upon the carton blank 100 may be seen. As shown, the tape length 230A is formed having a length L which is sufficient to extend across the width of the aperture 126. Additionally, the width of the tape length 230 is sized to extend beyond the ends of the aperture 126 onto the carton segment 108 and the end closure panel 112. As will be explained in more detail below, this extension of the tape length 230a over the aperture 126 is necessary to facilitate the heat sealing and bonding process which subsequently occurs upon the rotating drum 146.

50 The rotational speed and relative orientation of the tape capstans 231 and 232 must be precisely synchronized with the rotation of the heat seal and alignment drum 146 to insure that the tape length 230A is deposited over the aperture 126 of the carton blank 100 upon the periphery of the rotating drum 146. Further, it will be recognized that it is imperative that the vacuum to the ports 259 located upon the land 257 of the lower tape capstan 232 be discontinued at the proper position to allow the tape length 230A to be transferred onto the periphery of the drum 146.

55 In the preferred embodiment, the applicant has found that by directly gearing the shafts 235 and 237 of the tape capstans 231 and 232, respectively, to the drive mechanism of the rotating drum 146 and additionally utilizing a slider plate valve (not shown) connected to the vacuum ports 259 to regulate the application of vacuum dependent upon the rotational orientation of the capstan 232, the precision and repetition necessary to facilitate proper operation of the tape dispenser 148 may be obtained.

60 Further, the applicant has discovered that, to

maintain the proper orientation of the tape length 230 entering the tape guide 233 and to prevent an excess amount of tape 230 from being dispensed from the tape guide 233, it is desirable to power
 5 advance the tape length 230 from the supply spool 236 to the tape guide 233. In the present embodiment, this power tape advance is accomplished by a motor drive (not shown) on the spool 236 which is controlled by a pair of pressure sensitive switches
 10 (not shown) positioned at different locations within a vacuum chamber 234 (Figure 5). As shown, the vacuum chamber 234 is preferably formed in a rectangular box-like configuration having a sealed and opened end, respectively. A vacuum duct 277
 15 communicates with the vacuum chamber 234 adjacent the sealed end and is connected to an external vacuum source (not shown). Disposed midway between the sealed and open ends of the vacuum chamber 234 is a wire screen or mesh 275 which
 20 permits the vacuum to act therethrough yet prevents the tape length 230 from entering into the duct 277. The pair of vacuum switches (not shown) are disposed adjacent the open end of the chamber 234 and are horizontally spaced from one another and
 25 the mesh 275.

As shown, the tape length 230 is wrapped around a spool 279 and inserted into the open end of the vacuum chamber 234 in a looped configuration. The vacuum, acting through the duct 277, pulls the tape
 30 loop toward the wire screen 275, causing the vacuum to act upon the side of the tape length 230 facing the screen 275. Thus, it will be recognized that the pressure switches (not shown) are exposed to vacuum or atmosphere depending upon the location
 35 of the tape loop within the chamber 234. In the present embodiment, this alternative exposure to the vacuum or atmospheric pressure is used to control the motor drive (not shown) of the spool 236 with the motor being actuated when the switch
 40 furthest from the screen 275 is under vacuum and deactivated when the switch closest to the screen 275 is under atmospheric pressure. Thus, the amount of tape length 230 available to advancement through the tape guide 230 is automatically reg-
 45 ulated to prevent the tape length 230 from being over-advanced during the tape dispensing cycle.

Additionally, it will be recognized that, due to the shearing of the tape length 230A occurring at a point
 50 substantially spaced from the end of the plate members 263 and 265 (as shown in Figure 14), a short amount of tape 230B extends beyond the plate members 265 and 263 upon each shearing operation. After shearing, the tape end 230B is thus in
 55 proper position for the repetition of the tape advancing, shearing, and depositing cycle. Thus, from the above, it will be recognized that, after passing beneath the tape dispenser unit 148 of the present invention, a length of tape 230A is cut and placed
 60 over the aperture 126 and maintained upon the carton blank 100 disposed upon the periphery of the rotating heat seal and alignment drum 146.

The next process performed in Station 1 is the heat sealing and bonding process wherein the straw
 65 element 220 is tack bonded to the tape length 230A

and the tape length 230A is concurrently sealed to the carton blank 100 over the aperture 126. In the present embodiment, this heat sealing and bonding procedure is accomplished on the rotating drum 146
 70 by a novel heater plate apparatus which is stored in a retracted position within the interior of the drum 146 and intermittently cams outwardly through the periphery of the drum 146 to contact the carton blank 100.

As shown in Figures 6 and 7, the drum 146 includes four square-shaped apertures 250 which are spaced symmetrically around the periphery of the drum 146 (i.e., at 90° intervals). The leading edge 252 of each of the apertures 250 is located adjacent
 80 the rear alignment tab 206 such that the aperture 250 is closely positioned near the panel segment 108 when the carton blank 100 is maintained on the drum 146. Cooperating with the aperture 250 is a heater plate 254 pivotally connected to a cam
 85 follower 256 which rides with a cam 255 (illustrated schematically in Figure 7) and is rigidly mounted within the interior of the drum 146. A hydraulic or pneumatic actuator 257 is additionally mounted to the cam follower 256 adjacent one end and extends
 90 to the heater plate 254 at a point located above the heater plate-cam follower pivot. As will become more apparent below, during rotation of the drum 146, the cam follower 256 rides within the stationary
 95 cam 255 thereby extending and retracting the heater plate 254 through the aperture 250. Upon extension therethrough, the hydraulic actuator 257 is energized and extended through a short distance causing the lower surface of the heater plate 259 to be pressed firmly down against the periphery of the drum 146.

The heater plate 254 preferably includes a resistive heating element (not shown) which electrically heats the plate 254 to a temperature suitable for rapidly tacking the polyethylene straw element 220 to the tape 230A as well as bonding the polyethylene
 105 coating on the Mylar tape length 230A to the carton blank 100. As shown in Figure 15, the bottom surface 259 of the heater plate 254 includes a raised boss 261 formed in a rectangular picture-frame-like configuration and a tab member 263 surmounted within the
 110 interior thereof, both of which are preferably formed having a smooth face. The outside dimensions of the boss 261 are sized slightly greater than the dimensions of the aperture 126 of the carton blank 100 such that when the heater plate 254 is pressed down
 115 upon the carton blank 100 disposed upon the periphery of the drum 146, the boss 261 and tab 263 contact the perimeter of the tape length 230A and a localized area of tape length located above the straw element 220, respectively, as indicated by the stip-
 120 pled lines in Figure 4.

Referring to Figure 7, the cycle of the heater plate 254 which occurs during each revolution of the drum 146 is illustrated. As the individual carton blank 100A is transferred to the periphery of the drum 146, in the manner previously described, the heater plate 254A (indicated in phantom lines) is stored within the interior of the drum 146 so that it does not interfere with the carton blank transfer process. As the drum
 125 rotates from a three o'clock position toward the twelve o'clock position, a cam follower 256 riding
 130

within the cam 255 extends the heater plate 254B radially outward through an aperture 250 and then slightly forward in a counterclockwise direction.

While in this extended position, a pneumatic

5 actuator 257 is energized in a direction indicated by the arrow in Figure 7, thereby firmly pressing the bottom surface 259 of the heater plate 254B against the carton blank 100. In the present embodiment, the outward reciprocation of the heater plate 254B and
10 direct contact against the carton blank 100 occurs rapidly and is completed at approximately the one o'clock position in Figure 7. As previously mentioned, the heater plate 254 only contacts the carton blank 100 in the localized area of the tape length
15 230A, straw element 220, and aperture 126 (as indicated by the stippled lines in Figures 4) such that the polyethylene substance coating the remainder of the blank 100 is not heated or damaged during this process.

20 The heater plate 254B remains in contact with the carton blank 100 for approximately 1/2 revolution of the drum 146 or until the heater plate 254C rotates past the nine o'clock position as shown in Figure 7. During this period, the heater plate 254B, being at an
25 elevated temperature due to a resistive heating element therein (not shown), causes the tape length 230A to be bonded to a portion of the straw element 220 and concurrently be sealed to be the outer surface of the carton blank 100.

30 It will be recognized that the temperature of the heater plate 254 must be maintained at a constant value which is sufficient to rapidly bond and seal the polyethylene straw element 220 to the polyethylene coated tape length 230A and carton blank 100, yet be
35 low enough to prevent vaporization of the polyethylene material or the melting of the Mylar substrate of the tape length 230a. Further, due to the polyethylene straw element being substantially thicker than the polyethylene coating on the tape
40 length 230A or carton blank 100, and the insulation effects of the cardboard carton blank 100, the temperature of the heater plate as well as the period of time that the heater plate 254 contacts the elements, must be carefully controlled to ensure a
45 satisfactory seal and bond.

Additionally, the applicant has found that, due to the different thermal expansion rates of the Mylar and polyethylene materials, the tape length 230A, if preheated, will wrinkle during the bonding process.

50 As such, the heater plates 254 must firmly press the tape length 230A against the carton blank 100 and additionally rapidly seal and bond the elements together.

Thus, it will be recognized that, through the
55 reciprocating heater plate 254 and raised boss 261 and tab member 263 of the present invention, a rapid, direct heat and pressure bonding of the tape length 230A, straw element 220, and carton blank 100 may be accomplished (in the present embodiment occurring in a time span of approximately 1/2
60 of a second) which could not readily be accomplished by the application of a remotely located heating member or preheating of the tape length.

65 Additionally, it should be noted that, although in the present embodiment the heater 254 utilizes a resis-

tive heater element, alternative heating and bonding processes which could be adapted to the reciprocating heater plate 254 (such as ultrasonic welding) may be utilized effectively.

70 As the drum 146 continues to rotate past the nine o'clock position, the cam follower 256 and heater plate 254C begin their retraction cycle, removing the heater plate 254D from the carton blank 100 and retracting it beneath the aperture 250. As shown, this
75 retraction cycle is complete when the drum 146 rotates to approximately the six o'clock position. Thus, after completion of one revolution of the drum 146 (which in the present embodiment occurs in one second), the heater plate 254 bonds the straw
80 element 220 to the tape length 230A and concurrently provides a liquid-tight seal across the aperture 126 as shown in Figure 4.

Although, for illustration purposes, the operation of only a single heater plate 254 has been described,
85 it will be recognized that four heater plates 254 are provided on the drum 146 which cooperate with four apertures 250, such that four carton blanks 100 are heat sealed and bonded during a single rotation of the drum 146. Further, it should be noted that since
90 the polyethylene coating is utilized on only one side of the tape length 230A and the Mylar substrate has a substantially higher melting point than polyethylene, the tape length 230A does not stick or adhere to the lower surface of the heater plate 259
95 when the heater plate 254 is retracted from the carton blank 100.

After the heat sealing and bonding process has occurred, the carton blank 100 is removed from the rotating drum 146 and transferred to the carton
100 blank pivot mechanism 152 by the stripper wheel assembly 150. Referring to Figure 16, the stripper wheel assembly 150 includes a disc element 262 which is securely mounted to a rotating shaft 264. In the present embodiment, this shaft 264 rotates at a
105 speed precisely two times that of the drum 146 (i.e., 2 revolutions per second) such that two carton blanks 100 may be removed from the drum 146 during each revolution of the disc 262. The outer periphery 265 of the disc element 262 is located in
110 close proximity to the periphery of the drum 146 (better shown in Figure 17) and is separated from the drum 146 by a small space or gap 266. As will be explained in more detail below, this space 266 permits the carton blank 100 to be removed from the
115 drum 146 and ride or be carried upon the disc 262.

Located generally on one side of the disc 262 and mounted stationary to the housing (not shown) is a stripper plate or shroud 268 having a concave inner surface 270 which is spaced concentrically around
120 the periphery of the disc element 262. This concave surface 270 provides a deflector surface for the carton blank 100 and causes the carton blank 100 to conform to the shape of the disc 262.

The disc element 262 is additionally provided with
125 two pairs of "L"-shaped transfer ears 272 located on both surfaces of the disc 262 and spaced 180° apart from each other. These ears 272 extend outward from the surface of the disc 262 in a direction parallel to the shaft 264 such that they may span across the
130 width of the periphery of the drum 146. Each ear 272

is additionally provided with a pair of tabs 274 having chamfered inner edges 276 which engage or grip the end closure panels 112 and 114 of the carton blank 100 (Figure 3) during the transfer of the carton blank 100 from the drum 146 to the disc 262.

The operation of the stripper wheel mechanism 150 may be easily understood by referring to Figure 16 and 17. The drum 146 and disc 262 are illustrated rotating in opposed directions as indicated by the arrows in Figure 16. As the rotating drum 146 with the carton element 100 thereon approaches the stripper wheel mechanism 150 (i.e., the six o'clock position), the vacuum supply (not shown) to the vacuum ports 147 (shown in Figure 11) is discontinued in the near vicinity of stripper wheel mechanism 150. This discontinuance of the vacuum from the ports 147 allows the leading edge of the carton blank 100 to fall from the surface of the drum 146 or spring in a downward direction into the space 266 (as shown in Figure 17).

In this position, continued rotation of the drum 146 along with the rotation of the disc element 262 pushes the carton blank 100 into the passageway formed between the stripper plate or shroud 268 and the periphery of the disc 262. During this motion, the carton blank 100 contacts the concave surface 270 of the plate 268 and bends into an arcuate configuration. As the drum 146 and disc 262 continue their opposed synchronized rotation, the tabs 206 of the drum 146 and the ears 272 of the tabs 274 of the disc 262, confront each other in a tangential relationship, so that the tabs 206 and tabs 274 are in a generally parallel configuration as shown in Figure 17.

In this position, the carton blank 100 releases from the registry tabs 206 as well as from the periphery of the drum 146 and is aligned by the tab 274 of the ears 272. As may be recognized, since the tabs 206 and 274 each include chamfered inside edges, transfer of the carton element 100 between the tabs 206 and 274 occurs smoothly without bending or deforming the carton blank 100.

Following this transfer of the carton blank 100 between the tabs 206 and 274, continued travel of the carton blank 100 is provided exclusively by the rotation of the disc 262 with the edges of the end panels 112 and 114 contacting the tabs 274 in a similar manner to that previously described in reference to the rotating drum 146 and with the stripper plate or shroud 268 loosely holding the carton blank 100 against the disc 262. Subsequently, as the disc 262 rotates through approximately a 180° arc, the carton blank 100 exits the stripper wheel mechanism 150 adjacent the lower end of the stripper plate 268 and is disengaged from the tabs 274 of the ear pairs 272. Thus, the carton blank 100 is deposited with the straw element 220 facing in a downward direction, upon the horizontal pivot mechanism 152 as shown in Figure 16.

Once the carton blank 100 is disengaged from the ears 272, the disc 262 is free to continue its clockwise rotation without imparting any further motion to the carton blank 100 and travels toward the twelve o'clock position to another carton blank 100 on the drum 146. Thus, as may be recognized, during each 180° rotation, the stripper wheel mechanism 150

transfers a carton blank 100 from the rotating drum 146 by stripping or peeling the carton blank 100 off the periphery of the drum 146 and depositing it in a horizontal plane for subsequent transfer to Work Station II.

Subsequent to its removal from the heat seal and alignment drum 146 and prior to total disengagement from the stripper mechanism 150, the carton blank 100 is transferred to the carton blank pivot mechanism 152 which feeds the carton blank 100 into Work Station II (the Mandrel Wrapping and Folding Apparatus). As shown in Figures 16 and 18, the pivot mechanism 152 preferably includes a continuous chain drive loop 280 which extends between two sprockets 284 and is formed of a plurality of straight link segments 282 flexibly interconnected at each end. These chain segments 282 and their flexible interconnections allow the chain loop 280 to follow a substantially semi-circular path as it travels in the direction indicated by the arrows in Figure 18.

A pair of support plates 271 and 273, preferably formed of Teflon (a registered trademark of E. I. DuPont De Nemours) possessing a concave and convex edge configuration, respectively, are rigidly mounted inboard and outboard of the chain loop 280 and form a guide channel which maintains the semi-circular orientation of the chain loop 280. In the preferred embodiment, these support plates 271 and 273 extend slightly vertically above the chain loop 280, thereby forming a support surface upon which the three leading carton blank segments 102 through 106 of the carton blank 100 may rest upon during transport (as shown in Figures 19 and 19A).

Although not shown for purposes of illustration, it will be recognized that a similar pair of plate members is disposed adjacent the lower portion of the chain loop 280 to guide the chain loop 280 on its return travel.

The chain loop 280 is provided with five pairs of L-shaped channel members 287 (note only two pairs are shown in Figure 18 for illustration purposes) which extend in a substantially perpendicular orientation thereto, and ride upon the top surface of the plate members 271 and 273. As shown, the channel member pairs 287 are equidistantly spaced from one another along the length of the chain loop 280, and oriented to consecutively receive a carton blank 100 from the stripper mechanism 150 in a manner described below. The height of the vertical leg 291 of these channel member pairs 287 is substantially less than the width of the horizontal leg 293, and includes a registry tab 295 adjacent both ends thereof. These tabs 295 are formed in a manner similar to the registry tabs 274 of the stripper wheel mechanism 150 and are designed to register the carton blank 100 along the edges of the end closure panels 112 and 114 in a manner previously described. The space between adjacent channel members of each of the channel member pairs 287 is sized to be slightly greater than the width of the end closure panels 112 and 114 of the carton blank 100 (as shown in Figure 3), such that the carton blank 100 may be received therein.

As shown in Figure 18, the chain loop 280 engages

a pair of sprockets 284 which are rigidly mounted adjacent opposite ends of a split drive shaft 283. This shaft 283 engages a differential gear train (not shown) mounted within a differential housing 285 which is driven from the main drive system (not shown) of the rotating drum 146 and rotates the sprockets 284 in opposed directions as indicated by the arrows in Figure 18. The rotational speed of the shaft 283 and thus the surface speed of the chain loop 280 is synchronized with the rotation of the disc 262 of the stripper wheel mechanism 150, such that, as the carton blank 100 is deposited in a horizontal orientation by the stripper mechanism 150 (as previously described), one of the channel member pairs 287 of the chain loop 280 is aligned beneath the axis of the disc 262 of the stripper wheel mechanism 150 (as shown in Figure 19).

As the carton blank 100, carried by the alignment tabs 274 of the disc 262, approaches the six o'clock position, the L-shaped channel member pair 287 disposed on the chain loop 280 simultaneously extends around the sprockets 284 to assume the position shown in Figure 19. In this position, the carton blank segments 102 through 106 of the carton blank 100 rest upon the support plates 271 and 273 while the frontal edges of the end closure panels 112 and 114 of the carton blank 100 contact the inside surface of the registry tabs 295 of the leading channel member 287. The continued relative movement of the disc 262 and the chain loop 280 causes the registry tab 295 of the trailing channel member 287 to contact the rear edge of the end closure panels 112 and 114, whereby the carton blank 100 is completely disengaged from the tabs 274 of the disc 262 with the end closure panels 112 and 114 as well as the trailing carton segment 108 residing exclusively within the pair of channel members 287 of the chain loop 280 (as shown in Figure 19A).

Once disposed within the channel pairs 287, the carton blank 100 is transported in a semi-circular direction by the continued travel of the chain loop 280 (as indicated by the arrow in Figure 18), and deposited adjacent the other sprocket 284 for insertion into the pre-feeder conveyor 300 (indicated by the phantom lines in Figure 18). It will be recognized that, as the channel member pairs 287 approach the other sprocket 284, the leading carton blank segments 102 through 106 extend horizontally beyond the axis of the shaft 283 and are entered between the pre-feeder conveyor 300 and an inclined plate 309 disposed therebeneath (as shown in Figure 18). The continued travel of the chain loop 280 causes the respective channel member pair 287 to extend downward over the respective sprocket 284, whereby the end closure panels 112 and 114 of the carton blank 100 are disengaged from the registry tabs 295 and the channel member pairs 287 travel back to their initial position along the lower portion of the chain loop 280. Subsequently, the pre-feeder conveyor 300 engages the end closure panels 112 and 114 of the carton blank 100 in a manner to be described below, thereby transferring the carton blank 100 to the carton blank wrapping and creasing mechanism at Work Station II.

It will be noted that during the operation of the

carton blank pivot mechanism 152, consecutive carton blanks 100 are being received from the stripper mechanism 150 between the channel pairs 287 at one end of the chain loop 280, while simultaneously one of the previously entered carton blanks 100 is being transported toward the pre-feeder conveyor 300. Similarly, as a channel pair 287 having a carton blank thereon is traveling toward the conveyor 300, another channel pair 287 is moving back toward the stripper mechanism 150 along the lower path of the chain loop 280 to subsequently receive another carton blank 100 from the stripper mechanism 150. Thus, from the above description, it may be easily recognized that, by travel of the carton blank 100 through Work Station I, a straw element and sealing tape is bonded and sealed to the carton blank 100 and the carton blank 100 is positioned upon the pre-feeder conveyor 300 for subsequent entry into Work Station II.

Work Station II - Carton Blank Wrapping and Folding

Referring again to Figure 5, the component systems comprising Work Station II (Carton Wrapping and Folding Apparatus) of the present invention may be described. Work Station II includes a pre-feeder conveyor 300, a shingling conveyor transport 302, forming mandrels 304, and a plurality of wrapping and creasing mechanisms 360 (not shown in Figure 5) which are disposed adjacent each forming mandrel 304 and positioned beneath the shingling conveyor transport 302.

Basically, at Work Station II, the individual carton blanks 100 are transported from the pivot mechanism 152 of Work Station I, and registered for entry into the shingling or stacking conveyor transport 302 by the pre-feeder conveyor 300. Prior to the entry of the carton blanks 100 into the shingling conveyor transport 302, the carton blanks 100 are arranged in groups of four with each carton blank 100, within the foursome, partially underlaid or shingled beneath each other by the pre-feeder conveyor such that the leading edge of each trailing carton blank underlays the trailing edge of the previously entered carton blank 100 (illustrated in Figure 21). Additionally, as will become more apparent below, the leading carton blank 100 of each foursome group is overlapped upon the preceding foursome group so that the leading edge of the leading carton blank overlaps the trailing edge of the last carton blank in the preceding group.

Disposed in this shingled orientation, the carton blanks 100 are transported as a foursome group across the top surface of the forming mandrels 304 by the shingling conveyor 302. The blanks 100 are then collated and each loosely wrapped around an individual mandrel 304 and separated from the conveyor transport 302. Subsequently, each of four carton blanks 100 is simultaneously formed into a square tubular configuration around and conforming to the shape of the forming mandrels 304 by the wrapping and creasing mechanism 360.

After having their side wall sections permanently creased to form a square tubular configuration, all four of the carton blanks 100 are pushed off or ejected from the forming mandrels 304, and transfer-

red to Work Station III (Seam and End Closure Bonding Apparatus). Thus, as will become more apparent from the disclosure below, upon completion of their travel through Work Station II, the carton blanks 100 are formed into a square tubular configuration as shown in Figure 29, with the straw element 220 and tape length 230A sealed thereon.

Referring now to Figures 20 through 28, the detailed construction and operation of the apparatus comprising Work Station II (Carton Blank Wrapping and Folding Apparatus) will be described. As shown in Figure 20, the shingling conveyor transport 302 and pre-feeder conveyor 300 both include a conveyor belt, 314 and 301, respectively, which are mounted at one end in a conventional manner by two pulley pairs 310 and 311. Both of the pulley pairs 310 and 311 are carried by a common shaft 312 with the pulley pairs 310 being rigidly mounted to the shaft 312 and the pulley pair 311 being rotatably mounted upon the shaft 312 by a suitable bearing 357.

As shown in Figures 1 and 16, the belts 301 of the pre-feeder conveyor 300 are held taut between the pulleys 311 and an additional pair of pulleys 313 which are rigidly mounted to a shaft 317, connected, as by a gear transmission (not shown), to the main drive system (not shown) of the heat seal and alignment drum 146. Similarly, as shown in Figure 5, the conveyor belts 314 of the conveyor transport 302 extend to an additional pair of pulleys 319. As will be recognized, by such an arrangement, the pre-feeder conveyor 300 is driven by the shaft 317 (shown in Figure 16) while the shingling conveyor transport 302 is driven by the shaft 312.

In the preferred embodiment, the travel of both the pre-feeder conveyor 300 and shingling conveyor transport 302 are synchronous, with the speed of the pre-feeder conveyor 300 being faster than that of the shingling conveyor 302. As will be explained in more detail below, this speed differential permits the carton permits the carton blanks 100 entering the pre-feeder conveyor 300 to be arranged in groups of four, and shingled or underlaid beneath each other prior to their engagement with the stacking conveyor transport 302.

Each of the belts 314 and 301 of the conveyor transport 302 and the pre-feeder conveyor 300 are additionally provided with plural pairs or registry tabs 316 and 315, respectively, which extend normal to the surface of the belts 314 and 301, and are spaced at predetermined intervals along the entire length of both belts. As previously described in relation to the tabs 206 and 274 of the rotating drum 146 and disc element 262, respectively, the space between adjacent tabs 316 and 315 of each tab pair is sized to receive the end closure panels 112 and 114 of the carton blanks 100 (shown in Figure 3). Further, as shown, the tabs 316 on the conveyor transport 302 are formed substantially longer than the tabs 315 on the pre-feeder conveyor. As will become more apparent below, this extended length of the tabs 316 permits the conveyor transport 302 to engage the carton blanks 100 upon the pre-feeder conveyor 300 in a manner which compensates for the speed differential between the conveyors 300

and 302.

As best shown in Figure 20, the pre-feeder conveyor 300 is preferably oriented at an angular inclination to the shingling conveyor 302 and is disposed slightly above an inclined plate member 309 which extends between the carton blank pivot mechanism 152 (shown in Figure 16) and the shingling conveyor transport 302 (as shown in Figure 20). This inclined plate member 309 is pivotally mounted adjacent its upper end and communicates with a cam drive 321 which rotates to intermittently raise and lower the plate member 309 about its pivot. The plate member 309, in addition, preferably includes a pair of side members 309A which extend vertically upward from the main planar surface of the member 309. As will be explained in more detail below, this plate member 309 provides a lower support for the carton blank 100 traveling along the pre-feeder conveyor 300 and additionally permits the carton blanks to be arranged into groups of four and partially underlapped beneath each other prior to their entry into the shingling conveyor transport 302.

Disposed beneath the plane of the conveyor belts 314 and equidistantly spaced along the length of the conveyor transport 302, are four forming mandrels 304 which are rigidly attached to the housing 320 at one end thereof. As shown, these mandrels 304 are preferably formed having a generally square cross-section and include a concave channel 322 and a pair of recesses 324 formed along their top and two side surfaces, respectively, which extend partially throughout their length (better shown in Figure 22). The concave channel 322 receives the straw element 220 attached to the carton blank 100 during the folding process, whereas the recess 324 facilitates the ejection or transfer of the carton blank 100 from the mandrel 304.

Cooperating with each mandrel 304 and mounted adjacent one side thereof, is a separator plate apparatus designated generally by numeral 326 which forms a portion of the wrapping and creasing mechanism 360. As shown in Figure 20, the separator plate apparatus 326 includes a slider plate 328 having raised side walls 330, and a pair of rigid elongate stops 332, all of which are mounted to a shaft 334. The shaft 334 is supported adjacent one end thereof by a support arm 336 having a bearing aperture 338 therethrough which allows the shaft 334 to be rotated therein. All four of the shafts 334 are additionally connected at one end thereof to a common drive mechanism 340 which may typically include a linkage drive such that all of the shafts 330 can be rotated simultaneously.

During the operation of Work Station II, each of the carton blanks 100 (shown in Figure 16) is transported from the carton pivot mechanism 152 of Work Station I by the pre-feeder conveyor 300 which receives the end closure panels 112 and 114 of each of the carton blanks 100 between its registry tabs 315 in a manner previously described. During this transfer, the carton blanks 100 are transported between the lower conveyor loop of the pre-feeder conveyor 300 and the top surface of the inclined plate member 309 (as shown in Figure 20) and travel toward the

shaft 312 of the shingling conveyor transport 302. As best shown in Figure 21, during this transport, the end closure panels 112 and 114 ride along the top surface of the raised side panels 309A of the plate member 309. As such, the trailing edge of each carton blank 100 is slightly elevated by the side walls 309A while the leading edge of the carton blank 100 resides directly against the main planar surface of the plate member 309.

As illustrated in Figure 21, this differing elevation of the carton blanks 100 upon the inclined plate 309, allows consecutive carton blanks 100A, 100B, 100C, and 100D of each foursome to be group oriented along the plate member 309 such that the leading edge of the following carton blanks 100B, 100C, and 100D (indicated by the phantom lines reference by numerals 344B, 344C, and 344D, respectively) lies beneath the trailing edge of the preceding carton blanks 100A, 100B, and 100C. As such, consecutive carton blanks 100 are underlayed or shingled along the inclined plate member 309 for subsequent entry into the shingling conveyor transport 302.

This shingling along the inclined member 309 permits consecutive carton blanks 100A, 100B, 100C, and 100D to be wrapped around an individual forming mandrel 304, even though the mandrels 304 are spaced closer to one another than the length of the blanks 100. Further, this arrangement permits the compact arrangement of the mandrels 304 and the succeeding equipment stages, and is an important factor in permitting the present apparatus to occupy very limited floor space.

In addition to the shingling procedure, the inclined plate member 309 (as previously mentioned) arranges the incoming carton blanks 100 into groups of four for subsequent travel across the four forming mandrels 304. In the present embodiment, this grouping procedure is provided by the upward pivoting (in a counterclockwise direction as viewed in Figure 21) of the plate member 309 caused by the rotation of the cam 321.

In operation, as every fourth carton blank 100 travels down the inclined plate member 309 toward the conveyor transport 302, the lobe of the cam 321 causes the plate member to pivot upward. This upward pivoting of the plate member 309 causes the leading edge 344 of every fourth carton blank 100 to be disposed above the trailing edge of the preceding carton blank (i.e., overlapped upon the other four-some group) upon the inclined plate member 309. Subsequently, the cam 321 continues its rotation, so that the plate member 309 is again disposed in its lower, normal operating position.

As such, the next three entering carton blanks 100 are underlayed in the manner previously described, wherein the frontal edge 344 of each carton blank 100 lies beneath the trailing edge of the preceding carton blank upon the plate member 309. As will be explained in more detail infra, this particular four-some grouping of the carton blanks 100 permits the first four carton blanks 100A through 100D to be creased into a square tubular configuration about the forming mandrels 304 while a second group of four carton blanks 100 are simultaneously transported by the shingling transport conveyor 302

toward the individual forming mandrels 304. Hence, the creasing and forming cycles of the apparatus are superimposed with the transport and collating cycles of the apparatus, as will become more apparent infra.

During the shingling procedure upon the inclined plate member 309, the registry tabs 316 of the shingling conveyor transport 302 begin receiving the end closure panels 112 and 114 of the consecutive carton blanks 100A through 100D. Due to the pre-feeder conveyor 300 transporting the carton blanks 100 at a speed faster than travel of the conveyor transport 302, it is necessary to avoid accumulation and clogging of the carton blanks 100 upon the inclined plate 309. Thus, the conveyor transport 302 must remove the consecutive carton blanks 100A through 100D from the inclined plate member 309 at a speed greater than the actual traveling speed of the conveyor transport 302. In the preferred embodiment, this increased removal speed on the inclined plate member 309 is provided by the increased length and radial spacing of the registry tabs 316 of the conveyor transport 302 engaging the end panels 112 and 114 of the carton blanks 100.

As will be recognized, by engaging the carton blanks 100A through 100D at a point adjacent the extreme outer radial end of the registry tabs 316, the effective diameter of the pulley pairs 310 is increased and thus the surface speed of travel about the pulleys 310 is increased. In the preferred embodiment, the length of the tabs 316 (and thus their radial spacing) is formed such that, upon engagement with the carton blanks 100A through 100D, the effective diameter of the pulleys 310 in conjunction with the rotation of the shaft 312 exceeds the speed of travel of the pre-feeder conveyor 300. Thus, by such an arrangement, consecutive carton blanks 100A through 100D are rapidly stripped from the pre-feeder conveyor 300 at a speed equal to the speed of the pre-feeder conveyor 300 and subsequently transported horizontally at a slower speed by the transport conveyor 302 toward the forming mandrels 304.

Since the width across the raised edges 330 of the slider plate 328 is slightly less than the length of each of the carton segments 102 through 108, of the carton blank 100 (shown in Figure 3) during this transport by the shingling conveyor 302 toward the forming mandrels, the undersurface of the carton blanks 100 rest upon and are supported by the raised edges 330 of the slider plates 328. As such, consecutive carton blanks 100A, 100B, 100C, and 100D upon the conveyor 302 may travel unrestricted across all four of the forming mandrels 304.

As the leading edges 344 of each consecutive carton blank 100A, 100B, 100C, and 100D, carried by the conveyor 302 (Figure 21), approach their respective forming mandrels 304, the drive mechanism 340 of the wrapping and creasing mechanism 360 is momentarily activated, causing each shaft 334 to rotate through a short arc in a clockwise direction. This short arcuate rotation causes the rigid stops 332 and the slider plates 328 to pivot about the shafts 334 and raise vertically upward along their leading edges. The carton blanks lying directly above the

slider plates 328 (such as 100A shown in Figure 21) during activation will be slightly lifted, while the leading edge 344B of the following carton blank (such as 100B shown in Figure 21) is deflected downward by the plate 328 to travel beneath the slider plate 328. As will be recognized, the fifth carton blank which was previously overlayed upon the previous carton blank 100D by the pivoting of the inclined plate member 309, will additionally be slightly lifted during this pivoting of slider plate 328 such that the fifth carton blank 100 will not enter the creasing mechanism 360 at this time.

After entry of the leading edge 344 beneath the slider plate 328, the drive mechanism 340 is deactivated such that the slider plate 328 and the rigid stops 332 pivot back to their lowered position (i.e., the position indicated in Figure 20). Thus, the activation and deactivation of the separator plate apparatus 326 effectively separates or collates the individual carton blanks 100A, 100B, 100C, and 100D adjacent each forming mandrel 304. Further, since the slider plates 328 are returned to their initial planar orientation, the subsequent group of four carton blanks 100 may be transported in the same manner by the shingling conveyor 302 toward the respective forming mandrels 304.

Subsequent to the activation and deactivation of the separator plate apparatus 326, the end closure panels 112 and 114 of the carton blank 100 are still engaged with the conveyor transport 302 such that each of the carton blanks 100A, 100B, 100C, 100D continue their horizontal travel beneath the slider plates 328 whereby the leading edge 344 of the carton blank 100 contacts the creasing mechanism 360 as shown in Figures 22 and 23.

The creasing mechanism 360 includes a hinged member 362 having a reciprocating vertical wall 364 and an L-shaped pivoting, clamping jaw 366. As clearly shown in Figures 23 and 24, the vertical wall 364 is rigidly mounted to an elongate sleeve member 368 which is clamped at one end into a support rail 372. The sleeve member 368 supports a rotatable shaft 370 which extends beyond both ends thereof and includes an end cap 374 which is securely mounted to the shaft 370.

The L-shaped clamping jaw 366 is rigidly connected to this end cap 374 such that, as the shaft 370 is rotated in a clockwise direction, the jaw member 366 rotates toward the vertical wall 364. As will become more apparent, this rotation of the jaw member 366 toward the vertical wall 364 imparts a permanent crease or fold to the carton blank 100, thereby forming the carton blank 100 into a square tube configuration. The inside surfaces of the vertical wall 364 and the L-shaped clamping jaw 366 are each provided with a pair of spring plates 378 preferably formed from Teflon (a registered trademark of E. I. DuPont de Nemour) which effectively presses the carton blank 100 against the mandrel 304 during the folding process. Additionally, a deflector finger 279 is provided which is rigidly attached to the vertical wall 364 and extends in an angular segmented arcuate manner between the spring plates 378 of the vertical clamping jaws 364 and 366, respectively.

As shown in Figure 22, the creasing mechanism 360 is positioned below the separator plate apparatus 326 and disposed adjacent the side and bottom surfaces of the forming mandrel 304. In this position, the creasing mechanism 360 forms a barrier to deflect the horizontal travel of the carton blank 100 below the slider plate and is free to operate without interference from the separator plate apparatus 326 and shingling conveyor transport 302.

The operation of the creasing mechanism 360 is illustrated in Figures 22-27. As previously mentioned, during actuation of the separator plate apparatus 326, the leading edge of the carton blank 100 passes beneath the slider plate 328. After further movement caused by the conveyor belts 314, the leading edge 344 of the blank 100 contacts the deflector finger 279 disposed on the inside surface of the vertical wall 364 of the creasing mechanism 360 (better shown in Figure 23). This contact with the deflector finger 279 deflects the leading edge 344 of the carton blank 100 in a downward direction, and with the continued horizontal transport of the carton blank 100 by the shingling conveyor transport 302, causes the elongate section of the carton blank 100 (formed by the segments 102-108) to cam against the finger 279 to loosely wrap around the forming mandrel 304, as shown in Figure 25.

During this same horizontal transport, the leading edge of the end closure panels 112 and 114 of the carton blank 100 approach the forming mandrel 304, and contact the base of the elongate steps 332 of the separator plate apparatus 326. Since the ends of the stop 332 are bent in an upward inclination, the end closure panels 112 and 114 slide beneath the lower surface of the stops 332, but above the top surface of the forming mandrel 304. Continued horizontal travel of the carton blank 100 by the shingling conveyor transport 302 causes the leading edge of the end closure panels 112 and 114 to contact or abut the shoulder 380 at the base of the stops 332. This direct abutment with the shoulder 380 effectively stops the horizontal travel of the carton blank 100 on the shingling conveyor transport 302 and registers the carton blank 100 on the mandrel 304 such that the end closure panels 112 and 114 and the carton segment 108 (as shown in Figure 3) lie exclusively on the top surface of the mandrel 304 and the straw element 220 is disposed within the concave channel 322.

It will be recognized that during the entry of the carton blank 100 into the creasing mechanism 360 beneath the stop 332, the carton blank 100 is continuously being pulled in a downward direction from the conveyor transport 302 by the stop 332. This pulling causes the end closure panels 112 and 114 during the wrapping process to slowly slide down the length of the registry tabs 316 away from the belts 314 so that the panels 112, 114 engage the tabs adjacent their lower end. Referring to Figure 20, the frontal edge of the tabs 316 is preferably formed having a beveled or angular configuration which permit the carton blank 100 to readily be disengaged from the conveyor transport 302 upon confronting a substantial resistance to movement. As such, upon abutment with the shoulder 380, the increased

resistance to the horizontal travel of the carton element 100 along the conveyor transport 302 causes the registry tabs 316 to completely disengage from the end panels 112 and 114 and slide harmlessly over the trailing edge of the carton blank 100. In this manner, the carton blank 100 is maintained upon the forming mandrel 304 and is disengaged from the conveyor transport 302 without damaging or permanently creasing the end closure panels 112 and 114 of the carton blank 100.

Upon disengagement of the carton blank 100 from the conveyor transport 302, the creasing mechanism 360 is activated to begin the carton folding or creasing process. The progression of operations performed by the creasing mechanism 360 is illustrated schematically in Figures 25 through 27.

In its initial position (Figure 25), the creasing mechanism 360 partially surrounds the forming mandrel 304, and carries the carton blank 100 adjacent the deflector finger 279 along its inside surfaces. As shown in Figures 25 through 27, each of the forming mandrels 304 is preferably formed having a slightly inclined top surface and includes a small blocking member 381 extending a short distance above its top surface and rigidly mounted adjacent one side. As will be recognized due to this short protrusion above the top surface of the mandrel 304, the carton blank 100 is free to slide over the blocking member 381 during the above-described wrapping process and reside slightly beyond the blocking member 381 as depicted in Figures 25 through 27. As such, the trailing edge of the carton blank 100 lays flat upon the slightly inclined top surface of the forming mandrel 304 and is prevented from movement laterally away from the creasing mechanism 360 by the blocking member 381.

Subsequently, the entire creasing mechanism 360 is reciprocated toward and abutted against the side surface of the forming mandrel 304 (shown in Figure 26) by the transverse movement of the rail 372 as indicated by the respective arrow in Figure 23. By this movement, a corner 382 (shown in Figure 26) is permanently formed or creased into the carton blank 100 along the upper surface of the mandrel 304 with the stop member 381 preventing the carton blank 100 from sliding across the top of the mandrel 304. The formation of this corner 382 is aided by the indentation or scoring line 110 registered along the edge of the mandrels 304 and formed on the carton blank 100 (as shown in Figure 3) which significantly reduces the resistance to folding.

With the vertical wall 364 of the creasing mechanism 360 remaining in its abutted relationship with the mandrel 304 (as shown in Figure 26), the L-shaped jaw member 366 is rotated in a clockwise direction whereby the spring plate 378 urges the remaining segments (102-106) of the carton blank 100 against the forming mandrel 304 (shown in Figure 27).

In the present embodiment, the movement of the L-shaped jaw member 366 is accomplished by the rapid rotation of the shaft 370 through a short arc. Upon closing, the jaw member 366 permanently creases the carton blank 100 adjacent the lower

edges of the carton blank 100 (as shown in Figure 27) thereby forming corners 384 and 386. As previously mentioned in relation to the corner 382, the formation of these edges 384 and 386 occurs at the scoring lines 110 formed along the carton blank 100.

Since the spring clips 378 contact the carton blank 100 adjacent the corners of the forming mandrel 304, during closure of the jaw member 366, the carton member 100 is moderately stretched against the flats of the mandrel 304 to eliminate the possibility of sagging of the carton blank intermediate of the edges 384 and 386. Further, during closing of the jaw member 366, the deflector fingers 279 extend through the open slot 281 (shown in Figure 23) formed in the jaw member 366 to extend beneath the jaw member 366 as shown in Figure 27. As such, the carton blank 100 is tightly creased about the mandrel without any interference from the deflector finger 279. Thus, as may be recognized, by the dual movement of the creasing mechanism 360, first toward the mandrel 304, and then upward against the bottom and side surface of the mandrel 304, the carton blank 100 is permanently folded into a square tubular configuration.

After the creasing mechanism 360 has permanently folded the carton blank 100 around the mandrel 304, the carton blank 100 must be removed from the forming mandrel 304 and inserted upon the crossbar mandrel 400 (as shown in Figure 30) which forms part of Work Station III (Seam and End Bonding Station). However, prior to this transfer of the carton blank 100 into Work Station III, the sealing tab 120 (as shown in Figure 27) which extends above the top surface of the mandrel 304 must be folded over and permanently creased upon the top surface of the mandrel 304. Additionally, this sealing tab 120 must be folded over in a manner so as to be positioned beneath the lower surface of the carton segment 108 (i.e., the carton segment 108 overlays the sealing tab 120).

In the present embodiment, this folding of the sealing tab 120 is accomplished in a simple yet effective manner and occurs during the transfer of the carton blank 100 from the forming mandrel 304 to Work Station III. Referring to Figure 24, the apparatus for bending or folding over the sealing tab 120 and for transferring the carton blank 100 from the forming mandrel 304 to Work Station III is shown. For purposes of illustration, it will be noted that, in Figure 24, the carton blank 100 has been removed from between the forming mandrel 304 and the creasing mechanism 360. As shown, the vertical wall 364 and one of the legs of the L-shaped jaw 366 of the creasing mechanism 360 include a tab 388 at one end thereof, which extends inwardly toward the side surfaces of the forming mandrel 304. As may be recognized, these tabs ride within the recess channels 324 formed along both side surfaces of the mandrel 304 whereby the creasing mechanism 360 may slide forward along the length of the mandrel 304.

Disposed adjacent one end of the forming mandrel 304 and closely positioned to the top surface thereof is a folding block 389 which is rigidly mounted to the housing (not shown). The front edge of the block 390

is provided with an enlarged radius 399 and is inwardly tapered to provide an entry camming surface, whereas the side wall 392 is beveled so that only a reduced thickness of the block 389 extends across the width at the top surface of the forming mandrel 304. As will be explained in more detail below, positioned in such a manner the block 389 directly contacts the sealing tab 120, but only slightly lifts the carton segment 108 during transfer of the carton segment 100 from the forming mandrel 304 to Work Station III.

The sealing tab folding operation and the transfer of the carton blank 100 from the mandrel 304 to Work Station III may now be described. With the creasing mechanism 360 maintained in its closed position and the carton blank 100 formed into a substantially square tubular configuration as shown in Figure 27, the tabs 388 of the creasing mechanism 360 contact the rear edge of the carton blank 100. The entire creasing mechanism 360 then reciprocates forward or slides along the length of the forming mandrel 304 toward Work Station III. In the present embodiment, this sliding movement is accomplished by the travel of the rail 372 in a direction indicated by the respective arrow in Figure 23. However, other embodiments wherein only the jaw members 364 and 366 travel along the mandrel 304 may be utilized.

As this sliding movement is initiated, the carton blank 100 passes beneath the stops 332 (as shown in Figure 20) and is thereby released from the biasing force of the stops 332 which previously held the end closure panels 114 and 112 and the carton segment 108 against the inclined top surface of the mandrel 304.

Due to the subtly inclined top surface of the mandrel 304 as well as the moderate memory properties of the carton blank 100, during this sliding movement and upon release from the stops 332, the end closure panels 114 and 112 and the carton segment 108 tend to slightly spring upward off the top surface of the mandrel 304 to lie in an inclined orientation. This inclined orientation aids in the transfer process and additionally in the sealing tab fold-over process by allowing the end closure panels 114 and 112 and the carton segment 108 to slide past the folding block 389 while the sealing tab 120 is forced beneath the block 389. Thus, during the forward travel of the carton blank 100 along the mandrel 304, the end panels 114 and 112 and the carton segment 108 harmlessly ride against the upper beveled edge 392 of the block 389 and pass beyond the block 389. However, the sealing tab 120 directly abuts the camming edge 390 of the block 389 and is thereby bent in a downward direction toward the top surface of the mandrel 304.

As best shown in Figure 28A, the upper left corner of the mandrels 304 (as well as the mandrels 402 of the crossbar mandrel 400 of Figure 30) are provided with a small notch 383, the depth of which is sized slightly greater than the thickness of carton blank 100. The notch 383 preferably extend partially across the top surface of the mandrels 304 through a length slightly greater than the width of the sealing tab 120. As such, the notch or pocket 383 is adapted to

receive the sealing tab 120 during the fold-over process.

It will be recognized that the fold-over process of the tab 120 is aided by the spring plate 378 which maintains the carton blank 100 tightly against the side surface of the mandrel 304 and the scoring line 110 (as shown in Figure 5) which weakens the carton blank 100 at a point adjacent the edge of the forming mandrel 304. As such, during the transfer of the carton blank 100 onto the crossbar mandrel 400 (of Work Station III), the sealing tab 120 is bent over and forced between the bottom surface of the block 389 and the top surface of the forming mandrel 304 to reside with the notch 383 (as shown in Figure 28A).

Referring to Figure 28, the completion of the transfer of the carton blank 100 from the forming mandrel 304 onto the crossbar mandrel 400 (of Work Station III) is illustrated. As may be seen, the forming mandrel 304 and the crossbar mandrel 400 are aligned in an end-for-end orientation such that, as the carton blank 100 is pushed off the end of the forming mandrel 304, it is inserted onto the crossbar mandrel 400. Additionally, both the mandrels 304 and individual mandrels 402 of the crossbar mandrel 400 include a concave channel 322 and 422 which receives the straw element 220 during the forming and transfer processes, respectively.

Upon completion of the transfer of the carton blank 100 to the crossbar mandrel 400 (of Work Station III), the sealing tab 120 (indicated in phantom lines) contacts the top surface of the crossbar mandrel 400 and lies beneath the carton segment 108 of the carton blank 100. Thus, from the above description, it will be recognized that, upon completion of its travel through Work Station II, the carton blank 100 is permanently creased or folded into a square tubular configuration, having its sealing tab 120 placed beneath the lower surface of the carton segment 108 as shown in Figure 29, and additionally has been transferred to the crossbar mandrel 400 of Work Station III.

Following this transfer of the carton blanks 100 to the crossbar mandrel 400, the rail 372 reciprocates back to its initial position and the creasing mechanism 360 returns to its initial position adjacent the forming mandrels 304 (as indicated in Figure 22) and is disposed to receive the subsequent group of four carton blanks 100 which were simultaneously being transported by the stacking conveyor 302 during the creasing process.

For illustration purposes, the description as to the operations occurring at Work Station II has been presented in relation to a single carton blank 100 being formed around a single mandrel 304. However, it will be recognized that the same procedure described for the single carton blank 100 occurs simultaneously at the other three forming mandrels 304. Additionally, it will be recognized that, although in the present embodiment, four mandrels are utilized at this station, fewer or additional forming mandrels 304 with their respective folding and creasing mechanisms 360 may be utilized and the pivoting of the plate member modified to group the carton blanks accordingly, without departing from the spirit of this invention.

Work Station III - Seam and End Bonding Apparatus

Subsequent to the previously described transfer of the carton blank 100 from the forming mandrel 304, the carton blank 100 is subjected to a series of operations which occur at Work Station III wherein the carton blank 100 is permanently sealed along one edge to maintain the square tubular configuration and one of the end closure panels 112 is bonded to the carton blank 100 to provide a liquid-tight seal. In the present embodiment, all of the processes occurring at Work Station III are performed on the crossbar mandrel 400 (as shown in Figure 30) thereby eliminating the complex transfer systems associated in the prior art devices.

Basically, at Work Station III the carton blank 100 is initially sealed by the side sealing apparatus 430 along the previously overlapped edge at the junction 120, 108, formed during the wrapping process in Work Station II described above. Subsequently, the carton blank 100 is moved radially outward along the individual mandrel 402 of the crossbar mandrel 400 such that the sealing tabs 120 formed along the edge of the carton blank 100 extend partially beyond the end of the mandrel 402. In this position, the sealing tabs 120 are contacted by a folding apparatus 440 which folds the sealing tabs 120 tightly against the end of the mandrel 402.

Subsequently, the crossbar mandrel 400, with the carton blank 100 thereon, is rotated upward through a 90° arc. During this rotation, the end closure panel 112 contacts a roller 446 which bends the end closure panel 112 over the end of the individual mandrel 402. At the end of the 90° rotation, the individual mandrel 402 extends in a vertical orientation wherein an ultrasonic sealing die or horn 450 is pressed over the end of the carton blank 100 and mandrel 402 to seal the end closure panel 112 to the sealing tabs 120.

After the sealing of the end of the carton blank 100, the crossbar mandrel 400 rotates through an additional 90° arc to align the carton blank 100 for removal from the individual mandrel 402 and entry into Work Station IV (the Carton Rotating Apparatus). Thus, through the processes occurring at Work Station III the carton blank 100 is provided with a liquid-tight seal along its side and one end thereof.

Referring again to Figure 30, the detailed construction and operation of the component systems of Work Station III is illustrated. As shown, the crossbar mandrel 400 includes four individual mandrels 402 which are each preferably welded at one end to a mounting plate 404. These mounting plates 404 are attached across the flats of a square arbor 408 by a plurality of fasteners 406.

The free end of each individual mandrel 402 is provided with a die 412 secured to the mandrel 402 by a pair of socket head machine screws 414. As shown in Figure 31, the edges of the die 412 are formed having a raised land section 416 which includes four recessed pockets 418 formed on respective corners. As will be explained below, the raised lands 416 provide a hardened surface area which aids in the subsequent end bonding process, whereas the recesses 418 relieve the stresses

formed in the corner areas of the carton blank 100 and additionally allow the excess carton material which overlaps at the carton corners to be maintained beneath the outer surface of the lands 416 during bonding. The die 412 additionally includes a concave channel 420 which extends across one edge thereof and is aligned with a similar channel 422 which extends partially throughout the length of each of the crossbar mandrels 402 to receive the straw 220.

A stop 410 is mounted proximal one edge of the crossbar mandrel 400 and is connected to a mechanical linkage 411 which selectively reciprocates in a direction indicated by the respective arrow in Figure 30. The stop 410 is biased tightly against one edge of the individual mandrel 402 by a spring 413 and is formed having a shoulder 415 intermediate its length. As will be described below, this stop registers the carton blank 100 on the individual mandrels 402 and additionally, when actuated, moves the carton blank 100 radially outward along the length of the individual mandrel 402 for contact with the folding apparatus 440. The lower edge (not shown) of the stop 415 is preferably rounded, so that, as the arbor 408 rotates, the stop 415 may cam into spring-biased contact with each of the mandrels 402.

Aligned with and located vertically above one edge of the mandrel 402 is a side sealing apparatus 430 of the present embodiment which welds the carton segment 108 to the sealing tab 120, thereby permanently maintaining the square tubular configuration of the carton blank 100. As shown, the side sealing apparatus 430 includes an ultrasonic sealing horn 432 having an elongate section which terminates having an end 434 formed to grab or cam the extreme edge of the carton blank 100. As shown in Figure 28A, in the preferred embodiment, the end 434 is formed having a substantially planar portion 434A and a curvilinear portion 434B which protrudes downward below the portion 434A to extend over the corner of the carton blank 100. At the intersection between the portions 434A and 434B, a sharp edge 434C is formed which, as will become more apparent below, forms a camming means which pulls the carton segment 108 toward the corner of the mandrel 402.

The sealing horn 432 is mounted to the piston 436 of a pneumatic cylinder 438 which selectively extends and retracts the sealing horn 432 to contact the mandrel 402. The pneumatic cylinder 438 is secured to the housing (not shown) and is located inboard and at an angle with the mandrel 402, such that, when retracted (as shown in Figure 33) the individual mandrel 402 of the crossbar mandrel 400 is free to rotate upward through a 90° arc. In addition, the sealing horn 432 is mounted by means (not shown) to permit slight freedom of movement in a direction parallel to the length of the horn 432 but restricted from movement in a plane perpendicular to the length of the horn 432. As such, the horn 432 is self-aligning with the mandrel 402 to effectuate a proper bond or seal during operation.

Disposed adjacent one end of the mandrel 402 and mounted proximal thereto, is the folding apparatus 440 which permanently bends the sealing tabs 120

formed along the ends of the carton blank 100 against the lands 416 of the die 412. The apparatus 440 preferably includes a T-shaped jaw 442 disposed beneath the lower surface of the mandrel 402 and a pair of side jaws 444 which are mounted adjacent both sides of the mandrel 402. Each of these jaws is connected to an appropriate linkage (not shown), typically being cam actuated, such that the T-shaped jaw 442 reciprocates in a vertical direction, whereas the side jaws 444 reciprocate in a horizontal direction as indicated by the respective arrows of Figure 30.

Spring loaded and disposed vertically above the individual mandrel 402 and in a common plane therewith is a roller assembly 446 illustrated schematically in Figure 30. Basically, the roller 446 includes a relieved cylinder 448 having a reduced diameter section 449. The width of the section 449 is preferably sized to equal the width of the end closure panel 112 with the angular transition 451 between the reduced diameter section 449 and the main diameter of the roller 448 sized to tightly abut the sides of the carton blank 100. As shown, the roller 446 is rotatably mounted to a shaft 450 connected as by way of springs (not shown) to the housing (not shown).

The roller 446 is accurately positioned radially outward from the mandrel 402 such that, as the individual mandrel 402 rotates upward through a 90° arc, the reduced diameter section 449 of the cylinder 448 contacts and rolls across the end closure panel 112 of the carton blank 100 at a point tangent to the raised lands 416 of the die 412. As may be easily recognized, by contacting the end closure panel 112 during the rotation of the mandrel 402, the roller apparatus 446 folds the end closure panel 112 over the end of the die 402.

With the structure defined, the operation of the component systems of Work Station III may be described. As shown in Figure 30, the carton blank 100 is transferred to the individual mandrel 402 at the nine o'clock position of the crossbar mandrel 400 in a manner previously described with one edge of the blank 100 contacting the shoulder 415 of the stop 410. The stop 410 is initially spaced from the end of the die 412 an appropriate distance selected so that, upon abutment with the shoulder 415, the entire length of each of the carton segments 102 through 108 lies slightly radially inward of the land sections 416.

While in this position, the pneumatic cylinder operator 438 is energized, causing the sealing horn 432 to extend in a downward direction and contact the carton blank 100 adjacent one edge of the mandrel 402. While in this extended position, the end 434 of the sealing horn 432 extends partially on both sides of the edge and firmly presses the carton section 108 against the sealing tab 120. Due to the end 434 having the particular configuration shown in Figure 28A, upon contacting the carton blank 100, the carton section 108 is grabbed and pulled tightly toward the corner of mandrel 402 by the sharp edge 234C and curve protrusion 434B thereby forming a tight corner. The horn 432 is then energized by well known driving apparatus, and the sealing tab 120 is bonded to the carton segment 108 by an ultrasonic

welding process which is well known in the art: however, alternative methods of forming the bond, such as heat sealing, may be utilized. Thus, by this ultrasonic welding process, a liquid-tight seal is formed along the edge of the carton blank 100 which permanently maintains the square tubular configuration of the carton blank 100.

Subsequent to this ultrasonic welding process, the pneumatic cylinder 438 is de-activated to retract the sealing horn 432 into a stored position as indicated in Figure 33. Since, as previously described, the pneumatic cylinder operator 438 is mounted inboard and at an angle with the plane of the crossbar mandrel 400, upon retraction, the crossbar mandrel 400 is clear to rotate in a clockwise direction as indicated in Figure 33. Prior to this rotation of the crossbar mandrel 400, however, the sealing tabs 120 located adjacent the outer end of the individual mandrel 402 must be folded over the end of the die 412.

In the present embodiment, this folding procedure is accomplished quickly and easily by the folding apparatus 440. With the sealing horn 432 retracted from the edge of the carton blank 100, the carton blank 100 is maintained on the mandrel 402 only by frictional forces and, therefore, may be easily positioned along the length of the mandrel 402. To expose the sealing tabs 120 beyond the end of the die 412, for the subsequent folding operation, the stop 410 driven by the linkage 411 moves radially outward from its initial position (as shown by the phantom lines in Figure 33), thereby pushing the carton blank 100 partially off the end of the mandrel 402. Upon movement through this short distance, the scoring lines 122 formed adjacent the edges of the carton segments 102 through 106 of the carton blank 100 (as shown in Figure 3) are aligned with the outside edge of the lands 416 of the die 412. As previously mentioned, these scoring lines 122 weaken the carton blank material, thereby insuring that the fold will occur at the desired position along the carton blank 100.

The sequence of operations performed by the folding apparatus 440 is illustrated schematically in Figures 32A through 32C. With the sealing tabs 120 extending over the edge of the lands 416, the T-shaped jaw 442 of the folding apparatus 440 reciprocates in an upward vertical direction to a height slightly above the lower surface of the mandrel 402 (as shown in Figure 32A). During this movement, the jaw 442 contacts the sealing tab 120 along its top edge and crimps the tab 120 tightly against the land section 416 of the die 412.

Subsequently, the side jaws 444 are activated and move partially inward from their initial position shown in Figure 32A to the position shown in Figure 32B, wherein their leading edge extends to the vertical plane of the side edges of the die 412. During this partial inward movement, the edge of each of the side jaws 444 contacts the lower corners of the sealing tabs 120, causing the lower corners to be tightly creased between the T-shaped jaw 442 and the side jaw 444. Due to the T-shaped jaw 442 remaining in its extended position above the lower edge of the mandrel 402, the sealing tab 120 is

prevented from spring away from the die 412 thereby insuring an accurate corner folding of the sealing tab 120.

Subsequently, the T-shaped jaw 442 reciprocates slightly downward to a position wherein its relieved corners 442A are aligned with the lower corners of the die 412 and the side jaws 444 reciprocate fully inward across the frontal plane of the die 412 as shown in Figure 32C. As previously described in relation to the T-shaped jaw 442, upon their full inward travel, the side jaws 444 contact the sealing tabs 120 of the carton blank 100 and thereby tightly crimp or fold the sealing tabs 120 over the lands 416 of the die 412. Thereafter, the side jaws 444 are similarly reciprocated back to their original position as shown in Figure 30. As best shown in Figures 32A, 32B, and 32C, the right side jaw member 444 is formed slightly shorter in length than the left side jaw member 444. The applicant has found this length differential is desirable to eliminate the possibility of the sealing tab 120 tearing in the vicinity of the upper corner due to its integral intersection (shown in Figure 3) with the end panel 112. As such, during the sealing tab fold-over process, the portion of the sealing tab in the upper right-hand corner is not tightly creased against the face of the die 412 but rather is only urged against the die 412 for subsequent creasing by the roller apparatus 446.

Thus, upon completion of the movement of the T-shaped jaw 442 and the side jaws 444, the sealing tabs 120 are folded over the end of the die 412 and are oriented within the square tubular configuration of the carton blank 100 as shown in Figure 32. Additionally, it will be recognized that, due to the V-shaped scoring notches 124 formed on the carton blank 100 (shown in Figure 5), the corners of the sealing tabs 120 will consistently be folded flush with the carton segments 102-108 (any excess material lying within the square cross-section of the carton blank 100), thereby being properly positioned for the end closure sealing and bonding operation.

With the sealing tabs 120 folded over the end of the die 412, the crossbar mandrel 400 subsequently rotates in a clockwise direction through a 90° arc as indicated by the arrows in Figure 33. During this rotation, the carton blank 100 passes beneath and contacts the roller apparatus 446, thereby causing the end closure panel 112 to be folded down over the end of the die 412.

Referring jointly to Figures 33 and 34, the detailed operation of this rolling procedure is illustrated. While the carton blank 100 is carried by the individual mandrel 402 in the nine o'clock position, the end panel 112 extends beyond the end of the die 412 with the scoring line 118 (shown in Figure 3) being aligned with the top edge of the land section 416. As the individual mandrel 400 rotates from the nine o'clock to twelve o'clock position, the outer edges of the lands 416 pass closely beneath the cylinder 448 of the roller apparatus 446, whereby the end closure panel 112 contacts the reduced diameter section 449 of the cylinder 448. This contact forces the end closure panel 112 in a downward direction (from its initial position indicated by the phantom lines in Figure 34) tightly against the top surface of the die

412.

The cylinder 448 presses the end closure panel 112 tightly against the land sections 416 of the die 412 and rotates across the end of the die in a direction indicated by the arrow in Figure 34. As the cylinder 448 rolls across the end of the die 412, the angular transition 451 between the reduced diameter section 449 and the main diameter of the roller 448 tightly mates with the sides of the carton blank 100, thereby preventing the sides as well as the sealing tabs 120 of the carton blank from springing outward from the mandrel 402. Further, during this rolling process, the excess carton blank material disposed in the corners of the square tube (as previously mentioned and shown in Figure 32) is forced within the recess pockets 418 of the die 412 (as shown in Figure 31) such that the corners of the sealing tabs 120 are maintained within a common plane with the remainder of the sealing tab 120, contacting the land section 416 of the die 412. Thus, upon passing beneath the roller apparatus 446, one end of the carton blank 100 is folded and positioned upon the die 412 for subsequent bonding.

Upon completion of the 90° rotation of the crossbar mandrel 400, the carton blank 100 carried by the mandrel 402 is oriented in a vertical twelve o'clock position as shown in Figure 33 and is registered or aligned beneath the sealing die or horn 450. While in this twelve o'clock position, the sealing horn 450, which had been retracted in a stored position vertically above the end of the mandrel 402 (as shown in Figure 30) is lowered directly upon the end closure panel 112 (as shown in Figure 33). In the preferred embodiment, this downward travel of the sealing horn 450 is provided by a pneumatic cylinder (not shown), which is mounted by means (not shown) to permit the horn 450 to move slightly in a plane parallel to the top surface of the die 412 thereby self-aligning itself with the mandrel 402. The bottom surface of the sealing horn 450 preferably includes a shallow pocket (not shown) formed having a cross-sectional area slightly greater than that of the end panel 112 so that the sealing horn 450 may extend partially down over the end of the carton blank 100 when contacting the end closure panel 112.

In this lowered or extended position, the sealing horn 450 presses firmly against the end closure panel 112, thereby eliminating any raising of the end closure panel 112 from the sealing tab 120 caused by the memory properties (previously described) of the carton blank material and eliminating a misalignment with the mandrel 402. Subsequently, ultrasonic energy is applied to the horn 450, from suitable driving means (not shown), thereby bonding the end panel 112 to the sealing tab 120, and forming a liquid-tight seal along the end of the carton blank 100. After this bonding process, the sealing horn 450 is retracted vertically to its stored position above the end of the mandrel 402 by activation of the pneumatic cylinder (not shown).

Having sealed the end closure panel 112 to the sealing tabs 120, the crossbar mandrel 400 rotates through an additional 90° arc, to position the individual mandrel 402 carrying the carton blank 100

in alignment for transfer to the carton rotator and conveyor transfer apparatus of Work Station IV.

Although for illustration purposes, a single carton element 100 was described passing through the processes of Work Station III, it will be recognized that, upon each 90° rotation of the crossbar mandrel 400, an additional carton blank 100 is transferred to the individual mandrel 402, such that three carton blanks are carried by a respective three mandrels 402 of the crossbar mandrel 400 at most times. Additionally, it will be recognized that, since in the present embodiment, there are four crossbar mandrels 400 attached to the arbor 408 (as shown in Figure 5), four individual carton blanks are being formed simultaneously by the apparatus of the present invention. Each of these mandrels 400 moves intermittently through the 90° arcs described, pausing in stationary positions at the quadrant locations for the described operations.

Work Station IV - Carton rotator and conveyor transfer apparatus

Following the sealing operation performed at Work Station III, the carton blank 100 is transferred to the horizontal conveyor belt 550 which carries the carton blank 100 through the remaining Stations of the apparatus of the present embodiment. However, as may be recognized from Figure 33, if the carton blank 100 were transferred in its present orientation upon the crossbar mandrel 400 directly to the conveyor 550, the other end closure panel 114 which extends beyond the length of the carton segments 102 through 108 would lie in a plane perpendicular to the direction of travel of the conveyor 550, thereby obstructing the operations to be performed at Work Station V, VI and VII. Thus, to eliminate the obstruction problems associated with the end closure panel 114, prior to the transfer of the carton blank 100 onto the conveyor 550, the carton blank 100 is rotated 90° about its horizontal axis such that the end closure panel 114 lies in a parallel planar orientation with the travel of the conveyor 550.

Referring to Figure 35, there is shown the carton blank rotator mechanism designated generally as 480 which transfers the carton blank 100 from the crossbar mandrel 400 (of Work Station III) to the horizontal conveyor 550 and rotates the carton blank 100 through a 90° axial arc. Although for illustration purposes, only a single carton blank rotator 480 is shown, it will be recognized that, in the present embodiment, there are four carton blank rotators 480, each positioned adjacent the end of the respective crossbar mandrel 400.

As shown in Figure 35, the carton blank rotator 480 includes a transfer and ejector mechanism designated generally by 482 and a rotating fixture apparatus 484 which cooperate with each other in transferring and rotating the carton blank 100 from the crossbar mandrel 400 to the conveyor loader 550.

The transfer and ejector mechanism 482 preferably includes a transfer arm 486 and an ejector arm 488 which are each rotatably mounted to a slider mount 490 and 492, respectively. The slider mounts 490 and 492 are spaced vertically apart and are each reciprocally mounted to a guide pin 494 and spline

shaft 496 which extend between a pair of support columns 498. These guide pins 494 are rigidly mounted to the support columns 498, whereas the spline shafts 496 are rotatably mounted thereto, and extend through one of the support columns 498 at one end. The spline shafts 496 additionally engage the transfer and ejector arms 486 and 488, respectively, such that rotation of the shafts 496 cause a corresponding pivotal movement of both arms 486 and 488.

As shown in Figure 35, the spline shafts 496 are both provided with gear drives 500 and 502 which are interconnected by a timing belt 504 to rotate both spline shafts 496 simultaneously. Additionally, the diameter of the gear 500 is preferably greater than the diameter of the gear 502 such that the ejector arm 488 pivots through a greater arc for any given rotation of the transfer arm 486.

Mounted on the rear surface of the support columns 498 is a chain drive 506 which is connected in a conventional manner at one end to a mechanical drive to power the chain 506 back and forth repeatedly. Each of the slider mounts 490 and 492 are securely attached to this chain drive 506 so that, as the motor (not shown) powers the chain drive 506, the slider mounts travel horizontally between the support columns 498 along the guide pins 494 and spline shafts 496. Since the slider mounts 490 and 492 are initially connected to the chain drive 506 while positioned adjacent opposite support columns 498, and since the mount 490 is connected to the top of the chain 506 loop while the mount 492 is connected to the bottom of the loop, it will be recognized that, upon movement of the chain drive 506, the slider mounts 490 and 492 travel between the columns 498 in opposed directions, i.e., as the slider mount 490 moves from left to right as indicated by the arrow in Figure 35, the slider plate 492 moves from right to left. As will become more apparent below, this opposed movement allows the carton blank rotator 482 to begin transferring the carton blank 100 from Work Station III, while simultaneously depositing the carton blank 100 into the horizontal conveyor 550.

As shown, the transfer arm 486 includes an L-shaped extension 508 which terminates in a substantially rectangular head member 510. Both the extension 508 and head 510 are in this instance formed having a hollow interior aperture (not shown) which is connected to a vacuum source (not shown). The frontal face of the head member 510 is additionally provided with a plurality of vacuum apertures 512 which extend into an interior aperture (not shown) of the head 510 and extension 508 such that the vacuum source is exposed at the ports 512 to the front surface of the head 510.

Located in a parallel plane and adjacent to the transfer ejector mechanism 482 is the rotating fixture apparatus 484 which is securely mounted to the housing 514. The fixture apparatus 484 includes a hollow rectangular fixture 516, preferably formed of a stainless steel sheet material, having an open side wall configuration. The fixture 516 is connected at its ends to a pair of cylindrical bearing plates 518 which are rotatably mounted to the support posts 520. The

fixture 516 additionally includes a bracket 522 mounted on its lower surface (shown in Figure 37) which is connected to a linkage 524. As will be described below, movement of the linkage 524

causes the fixture 516 to rotate in a counterclockwise direction as viewed in Figure 35 such that its open side is oriented with or faces the transfer and ejector mechanism 482.

The sequence of operations performed by the carton blank rotator 480 (Work Station IV) is illustrated in Figures 35-38. As shown in Figure 36, the rotating fixture apparatus 484 (Figure 35) is aligned with and spaced from the end of rotating crossbar mandrel 400 of Work Station III. While in this position, the transfer arm 486 is extended into its extreme forward position and vertically lowered, whereby the face of the rectangular head 510 contacts the closed end panel of the carton blank 100 (as shown by the phantom line in Figure 35). Upon contact therewith, the vacuum source acting through the apertures 512 on the face of the head member 510, pull the carton blank 100 tightly against the face of the head member 510 such that the carton member 100 may be carried exclusively by the arm 486.

It will be recognized that the lowering of the transfer arm 486 to the position illustrated in Figure 35 was initiated by the clockwise rotation of the upper spline shaft 496. Further, since both spline shafts 496 are connected by the timing belt 504, this clockwise rotation causes a similar lowering of the ejector arm 488 from its position shown in Figure 35, to the position illustrated in Figure 36. Lowered in this position, the ejector arm 488 is inboard of the support post 520 of the rotating fixture apparatus 484, and may subsequently travel in a horizontal direction across the length of the rotating fixture apparatus 484 without obstruction.

With the transfer arm 486 and the ejector arm 488 disposed adjacent opposite support posts 498 (shown in Figure 35) the chain drive mechanism 506 is activated, causing the slider mounts 490 and 492 to travel horizontally along the guide pins 494 and the spline shafts 496 in opposed directions, as indicated by the arrows in Figure 36.

Since the carton blank 100 is maintained against the head 510 of the transfer arm 486 by vacuum, during this horizontal movement, the carton blank 100 is removed from the crossbar mandrel 400 and drawn into the hollow, square fixture 516.

The square fixture 516 is sized to have a slightly larger cross-sectional area than that of the carton blank 100 and the head 510, such that insertion within the square fixture can be accomplished easily with minimum friction. Further, it will be recognized that, during this placement of the blank 100 into the square fixture 516, the L-shaped extension 508 of the transfer arm 486 lies within the open side of the square fixture 516 and may travel throughout the length of the square fixture 516.

The opposed horizontal travel of the transfer arm 486 and the ejector arm 488 continues until the slider mounts 490 and 492, respectively, are adjacent the support posts 498 (as shown in Figure 37). In this position, the carton blank 100 lies completely within

the square fixture 516 and is aligned to be rotated in a counterclockwise direction through a 90° arc by the rotating fixture apparatus 484.

In the present embodiment, this 90° rotation is facilitated by the actuation of the linkage 524 in a direction indicated by the arrow in Figure 37. By this movement of the linkage 524, the fixture 516 rotates about the cylindrical bearing plates 518 mounted within the support posts 520, whereby the open side of the fixture 516 (as shown in Figure 35) faces the transfer and ejection mechanism 482 and is aligned for the subsequent transfer of the carton blank 100 into the conveyor 550.

Following this rotation of the carton blank 100 and square fixture 516, the spline shafts 496 are rotated in a counterclockwise direction, as indicated by the arrows in Figure 38, thereby pivoting the transfer arm 486 and the ejector arm 488 vertically upward into their positions illustrated in Figure 38. Raised in this position, the ejector arm 488 is aligned with the open side of the square fixture 516, having its tab 518 extending to abut the end of the carton blank 100 while the transfer arm 486 extends vertically above the axial plane of the fixture 516.

Subsequently, the gear drive 506 (as shown in Figure 35) is activated in a reverse direction from its previous travel, causing the slider mount 492 and the ejector arm 488 to travel in a direction indicated by the respective arrow in Figure 38, while the slider mount 490 of the transfer arm 486 simultaneously travels in an opposed direction. Thus, the tab 518 of the ejector arm 488 contacts the edge of the carton blank 100 and pushes the carton blank 100 through the length of the square fixture 516. As the carton blank 100 is pushed out from the square fixture 516, it is supported by an L-shaped bracket 520 which aligns the end of the carton blank 100 for entry into the horizontal conveyor 550.

Thus, from the above, it will be recognized that, by use of the carton blank rotator 480 of the present embodiment, the carton blank 100 is transferred from Work Station III to the conveyor transport 550 and is rotated through a 90° rotation such that the end closure panel 114 of the carton blank 100 is disposed in a plane parallel to the travel of the conveyor 550. Additionally, it will be noted that, subsequent to the completed horizontal travel of the ejector arm 488 wherein the carton blank 100 is deposited upon the conveyor 550, the transfer arm 486 has moved to an extreme forward position and may be rotated in a downward direction for a repetition of the cycle previously described. Similarly, upon transfer of the carton blank 100 into the conveyor 550, the linkage 524 is activated to return to its initial position as shown in Figure 35, such that the open side of the square fixture 516 faces upward in a vertical direction.

Semi-rigid transport conveyor

Referring now to Figure 39, the detailed construction of the conveyor 550 and the entry of the carton blank 100 therein may be described. As shown, the conveyor 550 is preferably composed of a plurality of elongate bar members 552 which are arranged in pairs and oriented in a parallel configuration with

each other. Each pair of the bar members 552 is rigidly attached (preferably by a fillet weld) at both ends to a connector rod 554 which maintains the parallel orientation of each pair of bar members 552.

5 Consecutive pairs of the bar members 552 are then formed into a continuous conveyor length by plural link members 556 which are rotatably mounted to both adjacent connector rods 554 and secured thereto by fasteners 558. Each of these fasteners
10 additionally mounts a roller bearing 559 which meshes with a gear drive 561 and supports the conveyor 550 upon a pair of horizontal rails 563. By such construction, the conveyor 550 provides a semi-rigid structure which has sufficient strength to
15 adequately support the carton blank 100 through the subsequent formation, filling and bonding processes, yet flexible enough to form a conveyor transport.

Disposed on each pair of bar members 552 and
20 rigidly attached thereto, are four U-shaped anvils or yokes 560 preferably formed from hardened tool steel which are constructed to tightly conform with the outside surfaces of the carton blank 100. The upper surface of anvil 560 adjacent the interior walls
25 thereof is provided with a beveled edge 562 which is preferably formed at a 45° angle and includes an enlarged radius at each of its interior corners. As will be explained in more detail infra, this beveled edge 562 cooperates with the pre-form apparatus of Work
30 Station V to prepare the carton blank 100 for the end closure process, and additionally mates with an ultrasonic horn (Work Station VII) which forms a liquid-tight seal across the open end of the carton blank 100.

35 To ensure the rigid mounting of the anvil 560 to the bar members 552, a support plate 564 possessing the same general shape but making an opening slightly greater than the anvil 560, is aligned with the anvil 560 and rigidly attached to the undersurface of
40 the bar members 552. Preferably, a series of fasteners (not shown) are inserted through all three members, i.e., the support plate 564, the bar members 552 and the anvil 560 from the undersurface of the conveyor 550 such that any relative movement
45 between these elements is eliminated.

As will be recognized, the conveyor 550 is held taut between two pairs of gear drives 561 (one of which is shown in Figure 39) located at opposite
50 ends of the conveyor and mounted to a shaft 565 which is connected in a conventional manner to the main hydraulic drive system (not shown). In the present embodiment, the gear teeth of the drive engage the conveyor 550 intermediate adjacent
55 pairs of roller bearings 558 and drive the conveyor 550 in an intermittent, cyclic manner (indicated by the respective arrows in Figure 39) such that each anvil 560 is momentarily stationary at pre-determined intervals along the length of the conveyor travel. As will become more evident below,
60 this stationary period allows the apparatus of Work Stations V through VIII to operate on the carton blank 100.

To support the bar members 552 intermediate their ends, a plurality of pairs of rigid support tabs or
65 ears 557 preferably formed of Delrin (a hard plastic

material possessing high wear characteristics), are located beneath the conveyor 550 positioned at each of the Work Stations V through VIII. As shown in Figure 39A, the support plates 564 rigidly connected
70 to the undersurface of the anvils 560, rest against the ears 557, thereby preventing any downward deflection of the bar members 552 and anvil 560 during operation. In addition to the support ears 557 positioned at the Work Stations, the conveyor 550
75 includes a pair of rigid bars 567 which extend throughout the length of the conveyor 550. As shown in Figure 39A, the rigid bars 567 are spaced from one another at a distance slightly greater than the width across each of the carton segments
80 102-108 and varied in their vertical distance from the anvils 560 such that they may maintain the carton blank 100 in a vertical orientation while being carried by the conveyor 550.

Located intermediate each pair of rigid bars 567
85 and disposed substantially below the plane of the conveyor 550 is a lower support bar 569 which is connected to a hydraulic actuator (not shown). As illustrated in Figure 39A, the lower support member 569 contacts the lower end of the carton blank 100
90 thereby maintaining the vertical height of the carton blank 100 upon the conveyor 550. Additionally, as indicated by the phantom lines in Figure 39A, the lower support member 569 is movable in a vertical direction by actuation of the hydraulic operator (not
95 shown), thereby accommodating the differing sized containers (1/2 pint and 1/3 quart) of the present invention.

Side-loader mechanism

100 Disposed beneath the conveyor 550 and located tangentially adjacent one end thereof, is a side loader mechanism 570 which is vertically aligned with the plural carton blanks 100 as they are transferred from the carton blank rotators 480 (of Work Station IV and shown in Figure 38). In the preferred embodiment, this side loader mechanism 570 simultaneously loads the four separate carton
105 blanks 100 received from the carton blank rotators 480 directly upon the conveyor 550.

110 As better shown in Figures 40 and 40A, the side loader mechanism 570 in this instance includes a plurality of C-section shaped fixture plates 572 which are spaced from one another along a mounting beam 575 at a distance slightly greater than the
115 distance across parallel flats of the carton blank 100. This relative spacing permits a single carton blank 100 to be received between adjacent fixtures 572 along the mounting beam 575.

As shown, the vertically extending sidewalls 577
120 of each fixture plate 572 are formed having a tapered top edge which in the present embodiment is formed with an acute angle of less than 45°. The fixtures 572 are each rigidly attached to the mounting beam 575 which is in turn connected to a linkage
125 573. Upon activation of the linkage 573, the beam 575 and thus the fixtures 572 move in a horizontal transverse direction toward the open end of the anvil 560. This horizontal movement of the fixtures 572 enters and accurately positions the plural carton
130 blanks 100 within the anvil 560. As will be explained

in more detail infra, the tapered top edge of the sidewalls 577 of each of the fixtures 572 permits the return transverse movement of the fixtures 572 within the interior of the conveyor 550 without contacting the carton blanks previously loaded and carried by the conveyor 550.

The detailed operation of the transfer of the carton blank 100 from the carton rotator and conveyor transfer apparatus 480 (of Work Station IV) to the conveyor 550 is illustrated in Figure 40. In the position shown in Figure 40, it will be recognized that the conveyor 550 is momentarily stationary in a tangential position aligned with the carton blank rotator and the transfer apparatus 480, whereby the frontal planes of the anvil 560 and of the C-shaped fixture 572 are perpendicular to the travel of the ejector arm 488.

While in this position, the space between adjacent C-shaped fixtures 572 is registered and aligned with the carton blank 100 such that the blank 100 may be directly transferred from the carton blank rotator and conveyor transfer mechanism 480. As the ejector arm 488 extends toward the conveyor 550 in a manner previously described, the carton blank 100, contacting the tab 518 of the ejector arm 488, is transferred to and received between the C-shaped fixtures 572. Since the space between the C-shaped fixtures 572, as well as the distance between the bar members 552, is slightly greater than the outside dimensions of the carton blank 100, the carton blank 100 is easily received between adjacent fixtures 572 without any bending or deformation of the carton blank 100 itself.

Once received between the fixtures 572, the ejector arm 488 retracts and rotates in a downward direction (as previously described) and the carton blank 100 is carried by the mounting beam 575. Subsequently, the linkage 573 attached to the beam 575 is activated, causing the fixtures 572 and the carton blank 100 carried therebetween to move transversely toward the open end of the anvil 560.

As shown in Figure 40, during this traverse movement toward the anvil 560, the carton blank 100, extending substantially beyond the leading edge of the fixture 572, enters into the open end of the anvil 560 with the interior surfaces of the anvil 560 contacting the flats of the carton blank 100. It will be recognized that, since the fixtures 572 are positioned beneath the conveyor 550, during the traverse movement, the leading edge of the fixture 572 will travel behind the lower surface of the anvil 560 thereby allowing the carton blank 100 to enter unobstructed into the anvil 560.

The C-shaped fixtures 572 continue their transverse travel until the leading edge 574 of the carton blank 100 contacts or abuts the interior wall of the anvil 560. As previously mentioned, since the interior dimension of the anvil 560 is sized to tightly receive the tubular configuration of the carton blank 100, the carton blank 100 is thereby slightly press-fitted into the anvil 560.

Subsequently the conveyor 550 begins its intermittent travel, whereby the carton blank 100, maintained within the anvil 560, moves arcuately upward with the conveyor 550 to an approximate 45° orientation

as shown by the numeral 100A in Figure 39. By this travel of the conveyor 560, the carton blank 100 is removed from between adjacent C-shaped fixtures 572 and is carried exclusively by the anvil 560.

Further, since the sidewalls 577 of the fixture 572 are formed having a tapered top edge, subsequent to the travel of the conveyor, the mounting beam 575 and C-shaped fixtures 572 may return to their initial position for repetition of an additional loading cycle, wherein another set of four carton blanks 100 may be transferred from the carton blank rotator and conveyor transfer apparatus 480 (of Work Station IV).

It will be recognized that the particular transverse movement of the carton 100 into the anvil 560 in a direction parallel to the plane of the surface of the anvil 560 allows the open end of the side panels of the blank 100 to moderately yield, allowing a close fit within the anvil 560. If the carton were inserted closed-end first, the previously welded corners would resist any yielding, and cartons would be crushed entering the anvils 560.

Further, by transferring the carton blank 100 to the conveyor in the manner previously described, the carton blank 100 is continuously supported by the two sides of the C-shaped fixture 572 as well as the mounting beam 575 during the carton blank's 100 entry into the anvil 560. The applicant has found that this support of the carton blank 100 during the entry into the anvil 560 is preferable to insure against any deformation of the square tubular configuration of the carton blank 100 caused by a slight interference fit between the carton blank 100 and the interior walls of the anvil 560. Further, the applicant has found that this side entry process, positively positions the carton blank 100 in its desired location within the anvil 560, thereby insuring the accuracy of the subsequent processes performed on the carton blank 100 while carried by the conveyor 550.

Referring again to Figure 39, it may be seen that, while carried by the conveyor 550, the top edge of the carton blank 100 is positioned slightly above the top surface of the anvil 560, and the end closure panel 114 is disposed in a parallel plane to the travel of the carton blank 100 on the conveyor 550. This positioning and orientation of the carton blank 100 upon the conveyor 550 facilitates the subsequent pre-forming, filling and sealing operations performed at Work Stations V through VIII, respectively.

Work Station V - End section pre-form apparatus

With the carton blank 100 positioned upon the conveyor transport 550 and carried within the opening of the anvil 560, the continued cyclic or intermittent horizontal movement of the conveyor 550 transports the carton blank 100 to Work Station V (End Section Pre-Form Station). At this station, the end closure panel 114 as well as the top edges of the open end of the carton blank 100 are creased or folded by a discrete three-phase operation into a desired configuration, suitable for the subsequent end closure bonding and sealing process, which occurs at Work Station VII. As will become more apparent below, the apparatus of Work Station V accomplishes the variety of folding and creasing

operations without the benefit of interior mandrels to work against, i.e., all operations occur without the use of supporting means or forming mandrels positioned on the interior of the carton blank. This particular pre-form configuration of the carton blank 100, which is accomplished at Work Station V, is substantially described in the co-pending U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 911,990, filed June 2, 1978, a continuation-in-part of Serial Number 822,500, filed August 8, 1977. However the apparatus for producing such a configuration is substantially modified in the present invention, and therefore is disclosed herewith.

Referring to Figure 41, the overall construction and operation of Work Station V may be seen. Work Station V includes a pre-form apparatus designated generally by the Numeral 600, which is mounted to a frame member 602 and located vertically above the conveyor 550. The pre-form apparatus 600 preferably includes a housing 604 which supports a mounting plate 606, rigidly attached thereto. Three die bases 608, 610, and 612 are securely mounted to the undersurface of the mounting plate 606 and are horizontally spaced at intervals equal to the distance between anvils 560 mounted upon the conveyor 550.

The dies 608, 610 include a plurality of plate operators (shown in Figures 43 and 45, respectively) which, during operation of the pre-form apparatus 600, contact the carton blank 100 and cooperate with the die bases 608, 610 to permanently crease the carton blank 100 into its desired configuration. These operator plates are activated by pneumatic mechanisms 614 and 616 (represented schematically in Figure 41) which are mounted to the top surface of the mounting plate 606 and disposed within the housing 604, each having an appropriate linkage (not shown) extending through the mounting plate 606. As will be explained in more detail below, each of the die bases 608, 610, and 612 perform an operational phase of the pre-form apparatus 600 and, upon engagement with the carton blank 100, folds or creases the carton blank 100 in a particular manner, whereby, upon completion of the travel of the carton blank 100 through each of these phase operations, the carton blank 100 is permanently folded into the particular configuration indicated in Figure 51A and illustrated in co-pending Application Serial No. 911,990, filed June 2, 1978 by Josef J. Buschor.

Further, it will be recognized that, although for illustration purposes, only one series of the die bases 608, 610 and 612 are shown and described, in the present embodiment there are four of each of the die bases 608, 610, and 612, similarly mounted to the plate 606 and positioned so as to register with the respective four anvils 560 carried by each pair of conveyor bars 552.

As shown in Figure 41, the housing 604 of the pre-form apparatus 600 is slidingly mounted adjacent its corners by four posts 620, which cooperate with four bushings 622 rigidly mounted to the housing 604. Each of these posts 620 extends at one end substantially into the housing 604 and is rigidly attached at the other end to the frame 602. A pair of push rods 603 (shown in Figure 1) located outboard

of the conveyor 550 are rigidly connected to the housing 604 and are engaged with the main transport drive (not shown) of the conveyor 550, to reciprocate in a vertical direction. As may be recognized, by such an arrangement, the housing 604, as well as the die bases 608, 610, and 612 carried thereon, is raised and lowered in a vertical direction indicated by the arrows in Figure 41. In operation, these push rods 603 synchronize the travel of the pre-form apparatus 600 with the travel of the conveyor 550, thereby insuring the proper formation steps are conducted on each carton blank 100.

Although for illustration purposes, in Figure 41, the housing 604 is illustrated disposed substantially above the level of the anvil 560, it should be recognized that, during actual operation, the housing 604 only reciprocates upward through a short distance (approximately 1 to 1-1/2 inches) such that, while in its lowered position, the bottom surface of the die bases 608, 610, and 612 lie slightly beneath the top surface of the anvil 560, and in its elevated position, the bottom surface of the die bases 608, 610, and 612 lie slightly above the top surface of the anvil 560, but below the top edge of the end closure panel 113 of the carton blank 100. The applicant has found that this short vertical travel of the pre-form apparatus housing 604 significantly reduces the time required for actuation of the pre-form apparatus 600 and additionally substantially eliminates any registry problems associated with extended travel of the apparatus.

The sequential operation of the die bases 608, 610, and 612 of the pre-form apparatus 600 may now be described. To help illustrate the progression of operations being performed by the pre-form apparatus 600, the carton blank is designated in Figure 41 by the numerals 100A, 100B, and 100C, representing the three separate operational phases occurring at the respective die bases 608, 610, and 612.

With the pre-form apparatus 600 reciprocated to its initial raised position, as shown in Figure 41, the conveyor 550 carrying the carton blanks 100 thereon, intermittently travels horizontally in the forward direction and positions the carton blank 100A beneath the die base 608. Since, as previously mentioned, the horizontal travel of the conveyor 550 is cyclic or intermittent in nature, upon positioning of the carton blank 100A beneath the die base 608, the conveyor 550 momentarily stops its travel, thereby facilitating the operation of the pre-form apparatus 604 upon the carton blank 100A.

While in this position, the housing 604 is lowered onto the carton blank 100A and the anvil 560 by the push rods 603, whereby the first phase operation of the pre-form apparatus 600 is performed upon the carton blank 100A. By this first operation, the carton blank 100A is accurately positioned within the anvil 560, positively seated upon the lower support member 569 and permanently creased along the free edges of the end closure panel 114 to form three beveled surfaces 632 (as shown in Figure 42).

Referring to Figures 43 and 44, the detailed construction of the die base 608, and the first phase operation of the pre-form apparatus is illustrated. As shown in Figure 43, the die base 608 is formed

having a generally square cross-section sized slightly greater than the carton blank 100A, thereby extending across three edges thereof. The bottom surface of the die base 608 includes a recess 621

- 5 formed adjacent three edges thereof. This recess forms a boss 623 which is received within the interior of the carton blank 100A during operation while a shoulder 625 formed by the recess 621 contacts the upper edge of the carton blank 100A.
- 10 The back surface (as viewed from Figure 41) of the die bases 608, includes a shallow central cavity 634 (Figure 43) having tapered angular walls formed at approximately 45° angles. Disposed outwardly from the back wall of the die base 608 is an operator plate
- 15 630 which is pivotally connected by linkages 631 and 633 to the die base 608 and pneumatic operator unit 614 (shown in Figure 4), respectively, being movable both toward and away from the back wall of the die base 608 as illustrated by the arrow in Figure 43. The
- 20 operator plate 630 is additionally formed having a projection 636, the configuration of which is a mirror image of the concave cavity 634 formed on the back surface of the die base 608.

- During the lowering of the pre-form apparatus 600
- 25 toward the conveyor 560, the operator plate 630 is initially spaced outwardly from the die base 608 (as shown in Figure 43) such that the end closure panel 114 may be received between the interface of the operator plate 630 and die base 608. As such, the continued lowering of the apparatus 600 allows the
- 30 boss 623 to enter into the interior of the carton blank 100 while the shoulder 625 formed on the bottom surface of the die base 608 contacts the top edges of the carton blank 100A and firmly presses or seats the
- 35 carton blank 100A against the lower support member 569 (shown in Figure 41). As may be recognized, this seating positively registers the carton blank 100A within the anvil 560, thereby insuring the accuracy of the subsequent creasing and folding
- 40 operations being performed by the apparatus 600.

- With the die base 608 lowered against the top edges of the carton blank 100A, the pneumatic operator 614 is activated causing the operator plate 630 via the linkages 633 and 631 to move toward the
- 45 die base 608. In the preferred embodiment, this movement of the operator plate 630 is very rapid, thereby imparting a high velocity to the operator plate 630 such that the end closure panel 114 is creased between the cavity 634 and the extension
- 50 636. This creasing action causes the end closure panel 114 to be forced into and permanently assume the shallow, recessed, angular cornered shape of the cavity 634. Subsequently, the hydraulic operator 634 is deactivated, causing the operator plate 630 to
- 55 move back to its initial position spaced from the die base 608. The housing 604 and thus the die base 608 is then raised back to its elevated position.

- Thus, from the above, it will be understood that, by the operations occurring at the first phase of the
- 60 pre-form apparatus 600, the carton blank 100A is properly seated in the anvil 560 and creased into a configuration illustrated in Figure 42, having three beveled surfaces 632 forming a picture-frame-like shape along the edges of the end closure panel 114.

- 65 Subsequent to completion of the first operational

phase of the pre-form apparatus 600 (i.e., the carton blank 100A being correctly seated within the anvil 560 and having its end closure panel 114 creased by the die base 608), the conveyor 550 continues its

70 intermittent horizontal motion, causing the carton blank 100B to be positioned and registered beneath the second phase die base 610.

- Basically, by this second phase of pre-form apparatus 600, the two corners of the carton blank 100B
- 75 located furthest from the end closure panel 114, are stress-relieved by being dimpled and pushed within the interior of the carton blank (shown in Figure 46A). Additionally, the sealing tabs 120 formed adjacent the top three edges of the carton blank 100B
- 80 are bent or folded within the interior of the carton blank 100B to be disposed in a plane normal to the end closure panel 114 (shown in Figure 48).

- The operations occurring on the carton blank 100B and the respective apparatus of this second phase of
- 85 the pre-form apparatus 600, are illustrated in Figures 45-48. As shown in Figure 45, the die base 610 preferably includes three plate operators 650 which are pivotally mounted at one end to the die base 610 by pins 651 and are connected at the other end to the
- 90 respective pneumatic operator 616 by linkages 653 and cross-head 655. As will be explained in more detail below, these operator plates 650 pivot in an inward direction towards the interior of the carton blank 100 when actuated, thereby folding over the
- 95 sealing tabs 120 of the carton blank 100B, which extend slightly above the surface of the anvil 560 (better shown in Figure 47).

- Disposed adjacent the two forward corners of the die base 610 (as viewed in Figure 41) are two
- 100 creasing pins 652 having their respective pneumatic RAM operators 654 securely mounted to the bottom surface of the support plate 606. As best shown in Figures 46 and 46A, these creasing pins are aligned diagonally with the forward corners of the carton
- 105 blank 100B and angularly oriented in a downward direction such that the pins 652, upon actuation, extend slightly within the interior of the carton blank 100B.

- The detailed operations occurring at the second
- 110 phase of the pre-form apparatus 600 may now be described. With the carton 100B aligned under the die base 610, the housing 604 carrying the die base 610 thereon is lowered (as previously described in relation to the first phase of the pre-form) onto the
- 115 carton blank 100B. As shown in Figures 47, when the die base 610 is extended to its fully lowered position, the three operator plates 650 pivotally connected to the die base 610 reside partially outboard of the edges of the carton blank 100B and are angularly
- 120 oriented such that their top edges extend within the interior of the plane of the carton blank 100B while their lower edges lie partially within the beveled edge 562 of the anvil 560. Further, disposed in this lowered position the operator plates 650 lightly
- 125 touch the top edge of the sealing tabs 120 extending upon the three sides of the open carton blank 100B, thereby causing the sealing tabs 120 to flip slightly inward toward the interior of the carton blank 100B, as shown in Figure 47. This particular slight flexing
- 130 has been found to substantially increase the rigidity

of the forward corners of the sealing tabs 120 and aid in the subsequent corner creasing operation performed in the second phase of the carton pre-form.

Subsequently the pneumatic RAM operators 654 of the creasing pins 562 are actuated, causing the creasing pins 562 to extend and travel in a direction indicated by the arrow in Figure 46, thereby contacting the two forward corners of the carton blank 100B. As previously mentioned, since the sealing tabs 120 are stiffened by the operator plates 650 at their top edge, upon contact therewith, the corners of the carton blank 100B precisely collapse or deform and are pushed within the interior of the carton blank 100B as well as in a slight downward direction. Due to the carton blank 100B being formed with the V-shaped scoring notches 124 (as shown in Figure 5) located at these respective forward corners, the corners consistently collapse into a V-shaped orientation as shown in Figure 46A. As will be recognized, this V-shaped orientation relieves any stresses in the corners of the carton blank 100B during the folding operations and effectively miters the forward corners of the carton blank 100B for the subsequent sealing tab 120 fold-over operation.

Having the corners of the carton blank 100B relieved in such a manner, the creasing pins 652 are retracted back to their stored position (shown in Figure 46A) and the operator plates 650 are activated by their respective pneumatic mechanism 616 to contact and fold over the sealing tabs 120. This particular fold-over operation is illustrated schematically in Figure 47, wherein the operator plates 650 are shown in their initial position placed over the carton blank 100B with the sealing tabs 120 adjacent their lower surfaces. From their initial position, the operator plates 650 are pivoted downward with the interior of the carton blank 100B in a direction indicated by the arrows to assume a position illustrated by the phantom lines in Figure 47. As will be recognized, during this downward pivoting of the operator plates 650, the sealing tabs 120 are folded over to reside exclusively within the interior of the carton blank 100B. As in the previous sealing tab fold-over operations, the consistency and accurate location of the fold is insured by the scoring lines 122 (shown in Figure 3) formed on the carton blank 100B, which substantially weaken the resistance to the fold at a precise location on the carton blank 100B.

As shown in Figure 47, the operator plates 650 pivot through an arc substantially greater than 90° such that, during the folding operation, the top edge of the sealing tab 120 initially extends downward within the interior of the carton blank 100B. This extended fold-over of the sealing tab 120 compensates for the slight memory property of the carton blank material (as previously described) so that, when the operator plates 650 return to their initial position, the sealing tabs 120 will spring slightly upward, but remain in a plane normal to the exterior walls of the carton blank 100B.

As will be recognized, in the ideal situation, the lower pivot point 651 of the plate members 650 should be located at the bend point (i.e., the scoring lines 122) of the carton blank 100B thereby insuring a pure and consistent bending force being applied to

the sealing tab 120. However, since all three sealing tabs 120 must be concurrently folded over, the operator plates 650 must be spaced from the scoring lines 122 and from one another to provide sufficient swinging room during the pivoting procedure. The outboard pivot point 651 of the present invention provides a suitable compromise structure wherein the operator plates 650 are spaced from one another to freely pivot simultaneously without contacting each other and which the applicant has found to yield consistent results. As such, during the pivoting of the plate members 650, the sealing tabs 120 not only pivot downward, but additionally slide or cam against the lower surface of the plate members 650. This sliding motion tends to force the lower portion of the sealing tab 120 to flex outward into the beveled recess 562 of the anvil 560. However, due to the scoring lines 122 weakening the sealing tab and forming, in effect, a preferential fold line, this outward flexure is held to a minimum and does not detract from the overall effectiveness of the fold down operation.

Subsequently, the pneumatic mechanism 616 is de-activated, returning the operator plates 650 to their original position as shown in Figure 46, and the housing 604 of the pre-formed apparatus 600 is vertically raised, thereby removing the die base 610 as well as the creasing pins 652 carried thereon from the carton blank 100B. Thus, as may be easily recognized, by the operation of the second phase of the pre-form apparatus 600, the carton blank 100B is formed into the configuration shown in Figure 48 with the sealing tab 120 folded within the interior of the carton blank 100B, and lying in a plane normal thereto with the two forward corners forming a miter-like corner interface.

Upon completion of the second phase of the pre-form apparatus 600 operation, the conveyor 550 again begins its intermittent horizontal travel, thereby positioning the carton blank 100C beneath the die base 612 for the third operational phase of the pre-form apparatus (shown in Figure 41). At this third phase, the top edges of the carton blank 100C are beveled outward to extend slightly beyond the sidewall sections of the carton blank 100C and the forward corners are stretched outward or expanded, to provide a suitable surface for end sealing, as shown in Figure 51A and described in detail below. In the present embodiment, this procedure is accomplished effectively and easily by the die base 612 (shown in Figure 49) being lowered firmly upon the top edge of the carton blank 100C.

Referring to Figure 49, it may be seen that the die base 612 is formed into a generally square configuration and includes a chamfer 660 along its lower edges. In the present embodiment, this chamfer is formed at approximately a 45° angle to the bottom surface of the die base 612 such that it mates with the beveled surfaces 562 formed on the anvil 560 (shown in Figure 50). As shown, the beveled surfaces 562 of the anvil 560 are provided with a series of circumferentially extending serrations 563 which (as will be explained in detail infra) form a gripping surface of the anvil 560 during the subsequent end sealing procedure of Work Station VII.

The two forward corners (as viewed from Figure 41) of the die base 612 slightly protrude from the flats of the die base 612 and are formed into a conical configuration 662. The outside diameter of this

5 conical protrusion 662 is a mirror image of the enlarged radii formed at the respective corners of the anvil 560 (shown in Figure 50). Thus, the lower edges of the die base 612 are formed to tightly mate with the beveled surface 562 of the anvil 560 such
10 that the die base 612 and anvil 560 cooperate to form a mold-like fixture.

As previously described in relation to the first two phases of the pre-form apparatus 600, in operation the die base 612 is lowered toward the conveyor 550
15 to contact the top edges of the carton blank 100C. Extended to its fully lowered position, the die base 612 contacts the sealing tabs 120 (previously folded over to lie within a plane normal to the flats of the carton blank 100C) and forces the sealing tabs 120 in
20 a downward direction against the adjacent lower portion of the carton blank 100C (shown in Figure 51).

The continued downward pressure of the die base 612 forces the carton blank 100C and its sealing tab
25 120 to reside between the beveled surfaces 562 of the anvil 560 and the chamfered edges 660 of the die base 612. As such, the top edges of the carton blank 100C are beveled outward and extend slightly beyond the vertical planes of the carton segments
30 102-108 of the carton blank 100C (as shown in Figure 51) and the serrations 563 are pressed slightly into the lower surface of the top edges of the carton blank 100C.

It will additionally be recognized that, during this
35 procedure, the forward corners of the carton blank 100C are stretched to conform to the conical corners 662 of the die base 612 and the enlarged radii formed in the anvil 560. Thus, the forward corners of the carton blank 100C are formed having an outer
40 enlarged radius as clearly shown in Figure 51A.

Subsequently, the die base 612 is raised in a vertical direction by the push rods 602 (Figure 1) in a manner previously described, whereby the sealing tabs 120 spring upward (due to the moderate
45 memory properties of the carton blank material) slightly.

Thus, from the above, it may be recognized that, upon completion of its travel through the pre-form apparatus 600 and its three-stage operation, the
50 upper or open edges of the carton blank 100C are pre-formed into a configuration suitable to the subsequent end sealing and bonding operation, without the use of forming mandrels or the like being inserted within the interior of the carton blank
55 100 during operation. Further, by the pre-forming process, the upper edges of the carton blank 100 are formed in an upward-facing picture-frame-like structure which mates with the configuration of the end closure panel 114. Additionally, it will be recognized
60 that each of the three phases previously described in reference to the pre-form apparatus 600, occurs simultaneously for each lowering of the pre-form apparatus 600 down upon the carton blanks 100A, 100B, and 100C.

65

Work Station VI - Filling Station

Following the pre-form apparatus operation, the carton blanks 100 are transported by the conveyor 550 to Work Station VI (the Filler Station). At this
70 station, the carton blanks 100 are filled with a desired liquid by a two-stage operation wherein, at the first stage, a pre-fill nozzle supplies a slight majority (approximately 60%) of the liquid to the carton blank and, at the second stage, a topper nozzle accurately
75 fills the carton to the precise liquid level. In the present embodiment, both of the nozzles, i.e., the pre-fill and topper nozzles, are constructed in the same manner, with the differences in the quantity of liquid delivered into the carton being controlled by
80 the adjustable displacement of a metering pump positioned on each of the nozzles.

As will be recognized, to fully utilize the space reduction made possible by the rectangular configuration of the container 12 (shown in Figure 1A),
85 the carton blank 100 must be filled with the desired liquid to a level proximal the open end of the carton blank 100. As such, the container 12 of the present invention is highly susceptible to spillage during the filling operation. Further, since, in the present embodi-
90 ment, the end closure bonding and sealing operation (occurring at Work Station VII) is accomplished with an ultrasonic welding process, it is desirable that, during the filling operation, liquid does not splash or foam onto the sealing tabs 120 formed at
95 the open end of the carton blank 100.

To facilitate both of these objectives, a novel filling nozzle and metering pump apparatus is utilized which, in the present embodiment, are combined
100 into a single integral unit providing a positive liquid displacement, a high volume, low velocity discharge, and an accurate discharge shut-off which significantly reduces the possibility of accidental over-fill and splashing of the liquid during filling. Further, an alternative nozzle device is disclosed
105 which includes all of the above performance features and is specifically adapted for use with a constant volume and constant pressure pump wherein liquid metering is accomplished exclusively by an internally reciprocating spool.

110 Additionally, a novel pump and valve operating and timing mechanism is disclosed which synchronizes the operation of the metering pump and nozzle with respect to the motion of the carton blanks upon the conveyor and provides an automatic and manual
115 no-fill mode which prevents fluid discharge when a carton blank 100 is not positioned under the nozzle or when desired by the operator.

Referring to Figure 52, the detailed construction of the nozzle 700 and metering pump 740 of the present
120 invention is shown. The nozzle 700 is formed having a generally cylindrical configuration and is preferably fabricated from stainless steel such that the corrosive effects of the liquid passing therethrough are minimal. A large central aperture 702 extends
125 substantially through the length of the nozzle 700 and communicates with an enlarged torroidal cavity 704 formed concentric therewith. Adjacent the closed end of the aperture 702 is an aperture port
130 706 which extends radially inward from the exterior of the nozzle 700 into the upper end of the aperture

702. The aperture 702 is enlarged at its lower end to form a discharge cavity 708 having a beveled or conical inside diameter 710. As will be explained in more detail below, this beveled diameter 710 provides a valve seat for a nozzle spool 712 and additionally directs the liquid passing through the end of the nozzle 700 inward towards its own center line.

Disposed within and slidably received by the aperture 702 is a nozzle spool 712, preferably formed in a closed end tubular configuration, the length of which is less than the length of the aperture 702. The spool 712 includes a plurality of elongated channels 714 which extend along the outer diameter thereof and are located such that, when the lower end of the spool 712 is seated against the beveled diameter 710, the top edge of each of the channels 714 reside slightly below the lower surface of the enlarged torroidal cavity 704.

The lower end of the spool 712 is provided with a valve cap 716 including a beveled edge 718 which mates with the beveled diameter 710 formed on the end of the nozzle 700. In the preferred embodiment, this valve cap 716 is formed of DELRIN, a relatively hard plastic material, possessing a slight resiliency which, when pressed against the beveled diameter 710, provides a positive shut-off for the nozzle 700.

The upper end of the spool 712 is preferably formed having a closed end 720, the outside diameter of which is slidably received within the aperture 702 and is provided with an O-ring seal 721 which forms a liquid-tight seal between the spool 712 and the aperture 702. As shown, the O-ring 721 is disposed within an annular recess 723 formed in the spool 712 and travels with the spool 712 during reciprocation within the aperture 702.

The upper closed end 720 is provided with an upward projection 722 having a generally conical shape which serves as a bumper for the internally moving spool 712 as it slides in an upward direction within the aperture 702. As shown, the upper end 720 in this instance includes an arm linkage 711 which is rotatably mounted in a ball and socket arrangement 713 at one end, and extends horizontally through an aperture 706 formed in the upper portion of the nozzle 700. The linkage 711 is pivotally mounted intermediate its length about a pin 715 which is rigidly connected to the frame (not shown) of the apparatus 10. The opposite end of the linkage 711 is adjustably connected to a push rod 717 which communicates with a linkage drive (not shown). As will be recognized, by vertically moving the push rod 717 in the direction of the arrows in Figure 52, the spool 712 reciprocates within the central aperture 702.

The inlet to the nozzle 700 is formed by a vertical aperture 724 which extends from the upper surface 726 of the nozzle into the enlarged torroidal cavity 704. The upper end of the inlet aperture 724 is tapered in diameter, forming a beveled shoulder 728 which, in the preferred embodiment, cooperates with a ball check valve 730. The check valve 730 is supported on its lower surface by a spider cylinder 731 having a plurality of radially extending webs 733 which slidably engage the cylindrical walls of the

aperture 724. Both the spider cylinder 731 and check valve 730 are biased against the shoulder 728 in a conventional manner by the spring 732. This ball check valve 730 permits flow into the inlet aperture 724 but prevents any reverse flow therefrom.

During operation, the spool 712 vertically reciprocates within the aperture 702 and functions both as a shut-off valve for positively sealing the discharge end of the nozzle, and a flow control valve for metering the passage of liquid through the nozzle.

The particular flow control properties of the spool 712 are made possible by the design of the channels 714. These channels 714 are designed such that the ratio of the flow cross-section of the channels 714 to the outlet flow cross-section 708 is essentially a constant value throughout the opening and closing of the nozzle 700, with the outlet flow cross-section being considerably greater than the channel flow cross-section. As such, as the liquid travels through the channels 714, it is free to flow into the larger discharge cross-sectional area 708, thereby dissipating fluid pressure and attenuating fluid velocity. Thus, the liquid exits the nozzle 700 at a substantially reduced velocity which yields laminar flow, thereby allowing the carton blank 100 to be filled without the possibility of splash-over.

Additionally, since the nozzle 700 of the present embodiment utilizes an internally moving spool 712 rather than an externally moving spool as utilized extensively in the prior art, upon discharge from the nozzle, the liquid is directed by the beveled diameter 710 inward, towards the center line of the nozzle. This inward directed flow allows the diameter of the nozzle discharge to be formed as large as the open end of the carton blank 100 into which the liquid is being delivered, thereby facilitating a high volume liquid flow rate. Further, the internally reciprocating spool 712 of the present invention specifically eliminates the entrapment of air under the nozzle discharge which occurs in the prior art nozzles, thereby greatly reducing foam generated during the filling process. In Figure 52C, a conventional prior art nozzle "N" is shown, having a spool "S" outwardly reciprocable (in a direction indicated by the arrow in Figure 52C) to valve the discharge "D". Typically, the spool "S" is normally closed by a spring biasing arrangement (not shown) which permits the outward movement of the spool "S" (i.e., opening of the nozzle) in response to incoming fluid pressure. Such an arrangement always results in a minimum discharge opening for a given liquid flow rate which yields a maximum discharge velocity. As shown, during operation, the conventional nozzle "N" discharges liquid over the end of the spool "S" creating an umbrella-like flow configuration. This umbrella configuration entraps air beneath the spool "S" and above the rising liquid level which generates substantial foam formation in the liquid "L". The generation of foam adversely affects filling accuracy and additionally promotes splash-over during the filling operation. Additionally, although some prior art nozzles have attempted to alleviate the air entrapment problem by venting the air through a central aperture (not shown) formed axially through the spool "S", such attempts have proven incapable

of providing a complete solution. In contradistinction to the conventional prior art nozzle, the internally reciprocating spool 712 of the present invention completely eliminates the air entrapment problem associated during the filling operation. As shown in Figure 52D, during filling, the spool 712 reciprocates upward, allowing the liquid to flow through the discharge 708 in a conveying flow configuration. As such, the umbrella of the prior art is eliminated with its attendant air entrapment and foam generation being eliminated. Thus, due to the high volume, low velocity flow rate through the nozzle, filling of the carton blank 100 occurs rapidly, without the possibility of liquid splashing onto the top edge of the carton blank 100.

By reference to Figure 52, the detailed operation of the nozzle 700 of the present invention may be easily recognized. In the present embodiment, the spool 712 is reciprocated vertically within the aperture 702 of the nozzle 700 by the downward reciprocation of the push rod 717 which is transmitted to the spool 712 via the linkage arm 711. During this movement, the spool is drawn upward toward the closed end of the aperture 702 until the protrusion 722 of the closed end 720 contacts the upper wall of the aperture 702. With the spool 712 raised to this elevated position, the channels 714 communicate with the enlarged cavity 704 and the lower DELRIN cap 718 is removed from the seat 710, such that the nozzle 700 is opened, and the liquid flows through the inlet aperture 724, channels 714, and discharge cavity 708 of the nozzle 700.

Alternatively, the nozzle 700 may be closed or shut off by reciprocating the push rod 717 in an upward vertical direction, whereby the spool 712 is forced in a downward direction within the aperture 702, isolating the channels 714 from the enlarged aperture 704 and simultaneously seating the DELRIN cap 718 tightly against the beveled diameter 710 of the nozzle 700. This tight sealing of the cap 718 positively shuts off flow through the nozzle 700 and eliminates any dripping of liquid from the end thereof.

Although, in the present embodiment, this reciprocation of the spool 712 within the aperture 702 is accomplished by the reciprocation of the push rod 717, it should be recognized that, alternatively, the upper end of the aperture 702 may include a vacuum port (not shown) which extends radially outward in the vicinity of the port 706 and is connected to an alternating vacuum-pressure supply. In this regard, a three-way solenoid operated valve (not shown) may be mounted to the vacuum port (not shown), and connected to both a constant pressure line and a constant vacuum line (not shown) which, by the operation of the solenoid, may be alternatively exposed to the vacuum port to facilitate the rapid reciprocation of the spool 712 within the aperture 702.

The amount of liquid passing through the nozzle 700 is controlled by the metering pump 740 of the present embodiment which is preferably rigidly mounted to the top surface of the nozzle 700. As shown in Figure 52, the metering pump 740 includes a bell-shaped cylinder housing 742 having an aperture 744 extending throughout its length. Adjacent

the lower end of the housing 742, this aperture 744 is enlarged to form a pumping chamber 746 which communicates directly with the inlet aperture 724 of the nozzle 700.

To prevent any leakage between the metering pump 740 and the nozzle 700, an O-ring 748 is provided along the periphery of the interface between the metering pump 740 and nozzle 700 and is clamped and maintained in position by a collet 750 which extends around the exterior diameter of both the metering pump 740 and nozzle 700.

Disposed within the chamber 746 is a pump piston 752 having an elongate upper section 754 and a lower head member 756. The diameters of the elongate section 754 and the head member 756 are sized slightly less than the diameters of the aperture 744 and pump chamber 746, respectively, such that the piston 752 may slide vertically within the housing 742. Additionally, both the elongate section 754 and the head member 756 are provided with O-ring seals 758 and 760, respectively, which prevent leakage of liquid between the piston diameters and the housing apertures.

An elongate aperture 762, preferably formed concentric with the piston 752 and extending throughout its length, provides a liquid inlet for the metering pump 740. As shown in Figure 52, the inlet aperture 762 includes a valve 764 biased in a closed position by a spring 766 and registered within the aperture 762 adjacent both ends by a plurality of guide projections 768. As will be recognized, the valve 764 allows liquid passage into the pumping chamber 746 but prohibits any flow of liquid in a reverse direction through the inlet aperture 762.

In operation, the pump piston 752 is initially raised upward through the length of the pumping chamber 746 by a rigid linkage 780 (shown schematically in Figures 53-55) attached to the upper end of the elongate section 754. During this upward travel, the pressure of the incoming liquid within the inlet aperture 762 (produced by the static head of liquid contained in storage reservoir 763, shown in Figure 1) causes the valve 764 to move off its seat or open, thereby allowing liquid to fill the volume of the chamber 746. The pressure within the aperture 762 and within the chamber 746 rapidly equalizes at the end of this stroke, so that, due to the biasing force of the spring 766, the check valve 764 closes or seats against the bottom surface of the piston 752.

Subsequently, the piston 754 is forced in a downward direction by the rigid linkage 780 (shown in Figures 53-55), thereby displacing the liquid contained in the pumping chamber 746 through the ball check valve 730 of the nozzle 700. During this downward travel or pumping stroke of the metering pump 740, the spool 712 of the nozzle 700 must be vertically raised within the structure 702 (in the manner previously described) such that the channel 714 communicates with the inlet aperture 724. As such, upon reciprocation of the piston 754, the entire volume of liquid contained within the pumping chamber 746 flows through the nozzle 700 and is deposited within the carton blank 100. Subsequently, upon completion of the pumping stroke, the spool 712 of the nozzle 700 moves vertically downward,

seating against the beveled diameter 712, thereby providing a positive shut-off for the nozzle 700.

It will be recognized that, in basic principle, the metering pump 740 of the present invention is conventional in design in that it simply provides a positive displacement piston pump including an inlet and outlet check valve. However, since in the present invention the metering pump 740 is combined with the nozzle 700 to form a single integral unit, the mechanism provides significant improvements over the prior art designs.

Besides the obvious size and weight reduction benefits made possible by such a design, the present embodiment significantly reduces the volume of the liquid passages on the outlet side of the metering pump 740, thereby greatly reducing the possibility of air ingestion into the liquid in the event that the spool 712 is not precisely timed to open and close at the beginning of the pump piston 752 travel. Further, since the lower surface of the piston 752 bottoms out directly against the top surface of the nozzle 700 at the end of the pumping stroke, the entire volume contained within the pumping chamber 746 is displaced through the nozzle 700, such that any air entering the system is swept out during each successive pumping cycle and will not accumulate in the pumping chamber. As will be recognized, this lack of air accumulation significantly increases the accuracy of the liquid quantity being delivered on each pumping cycle. Additionally, since the inlet to the pumping chamber 746 is concentric with the piston 752, any leakage through the valve 764 during the pumping cycle is substantially eliminated by the positive seating of the valve 764 caused by the increased pressure developed by the downward movement of the piston 752.

An alternative embodiment of a filler nozzle suitable for use in the present invention as well as many other filling applications is shown in Figure 52A. The alternative nozzle 950 includes a generally cylindrical-shaped body configuration formed of an upper and lower housing portion 952 and 954, respectively. As with the nozzle 700 of Figure 52, the nozzle 950 includes a central aperture 956 which extends in an axial orientation substantially throughout the length of both the upper and lower housing portions 952 and 954. Adjacent opposite ends of the lower housing portion 954, the central aperture 956 is enlarged to form two flow cavities 958 and 960. As shown, the upper flow cavity 958 communicates with the nozzle inlet 962, whereas the lower flow cavity 960 forms the outlet 964 of the nozzle 950.

Disposed within the central aperture 956 is a spool 966, the outside diameter of which is slightly less than the diameter of the aperture 956 such that the spool 966 may reciprocate. The spool 966 may be provided with an end cap 968 rigidly attached adjacent one end thereof which is preferably fabricated of DELRIN and formed to tightly mate with the beveled circumference of the nozzle outlet 964. As will be recognized, when this cap 968 is seated upon the outlet 964, the nozzle is valved with all flow through the outlet 964 being prohibited.

Intermediate the length of the spool 966, a plurality of flow channels 970 are formed which are spaced

symmetrically about the circumference of the spool 966. As with the embodiment of Figure 52, these flow channels 970 selectively communicate between the upper and lower flow cavities 958 and 960

thereby forming a metering passageway for liquid flowing through the nozzle 950.

At the intersection between the upper and lower housing portions 952 and 954, respectively, a cap seal assembly 972 is provided which provides a liquid-tight seal between the housing portions 952 and 954 as well as a low friction seal around the circumference of the spool 966. As best shown in Figure 52B, the cap seal assembly 972 resides in an annular recess 974 formed in the lower housing portion 954 and includes an O-ring 976 and C-shaped seal 978. The C-shaped seal 978 is constantly biased against the periphery of the spool 966 by the O-ring 976 and is compressed between the upper and lower housing portions 952 and 954 to prevent leakage between the housing portions 952 and 954.

In the preferred embodiment, the seal 978 is fabricated from a moderately stiff yet resilient elastomeric material which effectively forms a liquid-tight seal with the spool 966 yet possessing a small coefficient of friction to allow the spool 966 to readily reciprocate within the aperture 956. As will be explained in more detail below, this low friction stationary cap seal configuration eliminates any liquid displacement during the closing of the nozzle caused by the piston effect of a sealing member (such as the O-ring 721 of the nozzle 700 of Figure 52) reciprocating with the spool 970 within the aperture 956.

The upper housing portion 952 is preferably provided with a control chamber 980 which communicates with the upper end of the central aperture 956 and accommodates the bumper portion 982 of the spool 966. As shown, the control chamber 980 communicates with a vacuum pressure port 986 which may be connected to a vacuum and pressure source (not shown). As will be recognized, due to the cap seal assembly 972 being disposed between the housing portions 952 and 954 and tightly sealing against the spool 966, the control chamber 980 and upper portion of the central aperture 956 are isolated from liquid passing through the nozzle. As such, the control chamber 980 may be utilized to raise and lower the internal reciprocating spool 966 within the central aperture 956. In response to the alternative application of vacuum or pressure to the port 986. Further, in a preferred form of this valve, an additional port 984 is provided which may be provided with an air switch (not shown) or other similar device for sensing when the nozzle 700 is in its open and closed position.

In operation, the nozzle 950 is preferably connected to a constant pressure liquid supply (such as the elevated liquid reservoir 763 of Figure 1) which is connected to the inlet 962 of the nozzle 950 by means of the conduit 988. To permit liquid to flow through the nozzle 950, vacuum is selectively applied to the vacuum port 986 which causes the spool 966 to reciprocate upward within the aperture 956, thereby unseating the end cap 968 from the outlet 964. Liquid entering the inlet 962 then flows through the flow

channels 970 into the enlarged cavity 960 and through the outlet 964.

In the preferred form, the effective area of the flow channels 970 is formed to be less than the area of the lower cavity 960 such that the incoming liquid pressure may be dissipated and velocity attenuated through the valve 950 (as previously described in relation to the nozzle 700 of Figure 52). Additionally, the nozzle 950, due to its internally reciprocating spool 966 and angularly beveled discharge 964 provides an axially converging liquid discharge which, as previously mentioned, eliminates air entrapment beneath the nozzle discharge and foam generation during the filling operation.

To discontinue the flow of liquid through the nozzle 950, the vacuum to the port 986 is terminated and pressure is applied thereto, thereby causing the spool 966 to reciprocate downward toward the outlet 964. Due to the cap seal 972 remaining stationary during this reciprocation process, it will be recognized that the effective area of the spool 966 remains constant during closing. This same effective area prevents any displacement during the closing operation which would be present with the O-ring seal moving with the spool 966, and thereby eliminates the piston effect which causes a portion of the liquid contained within the aperture 956 to rapidly squirt from the discharge 964 during closing.

Further, in the preferred form, the flow channels 970 are formed to provide a substantially constant ratio between the cross-sectional flow area of the channels 970 to the outlet 964 throughout opening and closing of the nozzle 950. As such, the fluid velocity remains at a constant value during closing of the valve thereby yielding laminar flow.

Thus, the flow channels 970 perform a metering effect which, in combination with the cap seal assembly 972, provides an effective shut-off nozzle which eliminates any piston effect during closing and effectively operates with only one moving part, i.e., the spool 966.

Referring now to Figure 53, the operating and timing mechanism 780 of the present embodiment for synchronizing and adjusting the operation of the filler nozzles with respect to the motion of the carton blanks 100 carried by the conveyor 550 will be described. It should be noted that, for illustration purposes, the operating and timing mechanism 780 are described in relation to the nozzle 700 and metering pump 740 assembly of Figure 52. However, the same operating and timing mechanism 780 may be modified for use with the alternative nozzle 750 of Figure 52A without departing from the scope of the present invention.

As shown in Figure 53, the operating and timing mechanism 780 comprises a mechanical linkage driven by a cam operator 788 which is powered by a constantly rotating shaft 790 synchronized with the drive system (not shown) of the conveyor transport 550. The cam 788 converts the rotation of the shaft 790 into a reciprocating motion which drives a cross-head 792 via a vertical push rod 794. As will be recognized, the cross-head 792 is rigidly attached to this vertical push rod 794 such that the vertical push rod 794 and the cross-head reciprocate as an integral

unit in a vertical direction in response to the rotation of the cam 788.

Opposite ends of the cross-head 792 are connected to adjacent metering pumps 740 by way of a drive linkage 796 having one end thereof pivotally mounted to the cross-head 792 and the other end thereof pivotally connected to a rocker arm 798. As shown, the rocker arms 798 are rotatably mounted intermediate their length to the piston 754 of the metering pump 740 to form a central pivot, and are additionally provided with an adjustable pivot 800 at their opposite ends. This adjustable pivot 800 connects one end of the rocker arm to an air or hydraulic cylinder 802 which is pivotally mounted to the machine frame 804.

Since the metering pump 740 and nozzle 700 are additionally rigidly mounted to the machine frame 804, it will be recognized that, upon the vertical reciprocated travel of the cross-heads 792, caused by the rotation of cam 788, the pistons 754 of the metering pumps 740 are raised and lowered (i.e., comprising the pump stroke of the metering pump 740) by means of the vertical linkage 796 and rocker arms 798.

Referring now to Figures 53 through 55, the detailed operation of the mechanism 780 may be described. In Figure 53, the mechanism 780 is shown in its normal operating position, having previously completed a pump stroke and filling operation, wherein the piston 754 is extended to its lower-most position against the top surface of the nozzle 700 (as shown in Figure 52). In this normal position, the pneumatic or hydraulic cylinders 802 are retracted to their upper-most position, thereby providing a rigid structure for the pivot point 800 of the rocker arm 798.

Referring now to Figure 54, the operation of the mechanism 780 during the normal intake stroke of the metering pumps 740 is illustrated. In normal operation, the pneumatic cylinders 802 are pressurized to constantly remain retracted to their upper-most position as shown in Figure 53 whereby the rotation of the cam 788 causes the cross-head 792 to raise in a vertical direction. Upon this vertical travel of the cross-head 792, the rocker arms 798 pivot about the points 800, which are rigidly maintained in a stationary position by pressure exerted upon the cylinders 802, thereby raising the pump pistons 754. As previously described, during this upward pump piston 754 travel, the incoming liquid opens the check valve 764 and fills the pumping chamber 746 (shown in Figure 52) of the pumps 740.

Continued rotation of the cam 788 causes the cross-head 792 to reciprocate downward, thereby forcing the pump pistons 754 of the metering pump 740 in a downward direction, discharging the liquid contained therein through both nozzles 700.

It will be recognized that, since the vertical travel of the pistons 754 is dependent upon the ratio of the distances between each of the rocker arm end pivots 800 to the central pivots, minor adjustments on the pump stroke, and thus the pump displacement, can be independently facilitated by the limited travel of the adjustable pivot 800 along the respective rocker arm 798. As such, the displacement of each of the

metering pumps 740 may be finely adjusted during operation simply by manually turning a respective thumb screw 805 positioned on the end of the rocker arms 798. Further, it will be recognized that to

5 accommodate substantial differences in the metering pump 740 displacement, the cam 788 may be replaced with a larger cam having a greater degree of eccentricity.

Referring now to Figure 55, the operation of the mechanism 780 in a no-fill mode is illustrated. To provide a no-fill mode for one or both of the metering pumps 740, upon completion of the pumping stroke of the metering pump 740 and prior to initiating the intake stroke of the metering pumps 10 740, the air pressure maintaining one or both of the air cylinders 802 in a retracted position is discontinued, and nominal air pressure is applied to the reverse side of the air cylinders 802. By this nominal reverse pressure, the air cylinders 802 function in a manner analogous to a shock absorber being biased and extending in a downward direction proportionately to the upward travel of the cross-head 792 and causing the pivot point 800 of the respective rocker arm 798 to travel vertically downward. By this 20 downward vertical travel of the pivot point 800, the pump piston 754 does not rise with the cross-head 742, but rather is positively maintained at the bottom of its stroke against the top surface of the nozzle 700 (shown in Figure 52). As such, the piston 754 fails to complete its intake stroke and fails to receive liquid for its discharge stroke. Subsequently, upon completion of the discharge stroke of the cross-head 792, the hydraulic cylinder 802 may be selectively pressurized in a manner previously described and raised to 35 its normal operating position for the continued pumping and discharge cycle.

In Figure 55, this no-fill mode of the mechanism 780 is depicted wherein the right metering pump 740 is placed in a no-fill position (i.e., with the air cylinder 40 802 being biased in a downward direction) and the left metering pump 740 is placed in the normal position (i.e., with the air cylinder 802 retracted to its upper-most position). During the rotation of the cam 788 and the upward travel of the cross-head 792, the left metering pump 740 raises through its normal intake stroke whereas the right metering pump 740 is inhibited from moving upward by the proportional downward extension of the air cylinder 802. As such, 45 only the left metering pump 740 receives a liquid charge during the intake stroke.

Further, upon the subsequent pumping stroke, the downward travel of the cross-head 792 overcomes the nominal reverse pressure exerted in the right air cylinder 802 thereby causing the right air cylinder 55 802 to raise upward proportionately to the downward travel of the cross-head 792. Thus, the right metering pump 740 is maintained in its bottomed position against the top surface of the nozzle 700, while the left metering pump 740 discharges liquid through its respective nozzle 700 in a manner previously described. Thus, by reversing the pressure on a respective air cylinder 802, at the end of the preceding pumping stroke, the operator may selectively prohibit the subsequent filling operation 65 occurring in individual nozzles 700 without effecting

the operation of the remaining nozzle 700 connected to the mechanism 780.

It will be recognized that the cylinders 802 may be advantageously provided with a simple valving arrangement to actuate their operation which may be incorporated by a switch located on the operator's panel (not shown). Thus, the selective activation of the cylinders 802 may be easily accomplished by manually tripping the switch. However, it is 75 preferred that the mechanism 780 is connected to a carton blank electronic sensing device (not shown) provided on the conveyor 550. This electronic sensor, upon detecting the absence of a carton blank 100 upon the conveyor 550, automatically reverse pressurizes the air cylinder 802 such that the no-fill mode of a respective nozzle 700 is actuated.

In the present embodiment, both the pre-fill nozzles and the topper nozzles (shown in Figure 1) are provided with their own operating and timing mechanism 780, with the topper nozzle having a cam 788 substantially smaller than the cam of the pre-fill nozzle such that the amount of liquid delivered through the topper nozzle is much less than the amount of liquid delivered through the pre-fill 90 nozzles. Further, it will be recognized that, since in the preferred embodiment, there are four pre-fill nozzles and four topper nozzles, there will be two operating and timing mechanisms 780 for both the pre-fill and topper nozzles. Additionally, although in the present embodiment a mechanical operating and timing mechanism 780 is shown, it will be recognized that alternatively a hydraulic or pneumatic actuator connected to each of the pump pistons 750 including an appropriate metering valve system 100 may be utilized without departing from the teachings of the present invention.

Work Station VII - End Closure and Bonding Apparatus

Subsequent to the filling operation occurring at Work Station VI, the carton blank 100, carried by the conveyor 550, is transported to Work Station VII, the End Closure and Bonding Station. At this station, the end closure panel 114 which heretofore has been 110 extending vertically above the surface of the anvil 550, is folded over the open end of the carton blank 100, and then bonded and sealed to the sealing tabs 120 (shown in Figure 3) to produce the sealed container 12 shown in Figure 1A.

In the present embodiment, this bonding operation is facilitated by an ultrasonic welding process (previously described in reference to Work Station III), which significantly eliminates the production of vapors emitted from the polyethylene film which 120 could contaminate the liquid contained within the carton blank 100 and additionally settles the adjacent sealing surfaces of the carton blank 100 into perfect alignment thereby insuring a positive seal.

Referring now to Figures 56 through 60, the apparatus comprising Work Station VII, the end closure and sealing apparatus, is illustrated. As shown in Figure 56, the apparatus includes a camming plate 850 which is rigidly mounted to a linkage 852 and disposed slightly above the top surface of the anvil 560. The plate 850 is preferably formed of

Teflon (a registered trademark of E. I. Dupont de Nemours) having a rectangular configuration, one edge 854 of which is tapered to provide a beveled or camming surface. Although, for illustration purposes, only one camming plate 850 is depicted in Figure 56, it will be recognized that, in the present embodiment, four plates 850 are utilized being interconnected by the linkage 852, each being disposed adjacent a respective anvil 560 of the conveyor 550.

In operation, the carton blank 100 is transported by the intermittent cyclic drive of the conveyor 550 to a position, indicated in Figure 56, wherein the anvil 560 resides adjacent the camming plate 850. In this position, the linkage 852 is activated, causing this linkage 852 to reciprocate in the direction shown by the arrow in Figure 56, whereby the beveled edge 854 of the camming plate 850 contacts and extends over the end closure panel 114 of the carton blank 100 adjacent the top surface of the anvil 560. During this contact, the end closure panel 114 is urged in a downward direction as illustrated by the arrow in Figure 57, whereby the end closure panel 114 is folded over between the lower surface of the plate 850 and the anvil 560 to reside slightly beneath the top surface of the anvil 560 (with the beveled panel 114 abutting the picture-frame-like sealing tabs 120.

As will be recognized, since the end closure panel 114 was previously creased by the pre-form apparatus of Work Station V to include a picture-frame-like beveled edge, during this fold-over process, the end closure panel 114 mates with the sealing tabs 120 of the carton blank 100 maintained against the beveled surfaces 562 formed along the top surface of the anvil 560. However, due to the moderate memory properties of the carton blank material, the end closure panel 114 tends to spring slightly upward away from the sealing tabs 120 after the operation of the camming plate 850, as depicted in phantom lines in Figure 57. Thus, upon completion of the travel of the camming plate 850 across the end closure panel 114, the end closure panel 114 is substantially folded down upon the open end of the carton blank 100 and is pre-positioned for the subsequent sealing and bonding process.

Subsequently, the conveyor 550 continues its intermittent travel, thereby positioning the carton blank 100 beneath a sealing die or horn 860 (shown in Figure 59) which, in the preferred embodiment, seals the perimeter of the end closure panel 114 onto the sealing tabs 120 of the carton blank 100; the direction of movement of the conveyor being indicated by the respective arrows in Figure 59. As best shown in Figure 58, the sealing horn 860 is formed having a substantially square cross-sectional configuration and includes a beveled edge 862 formed adjacent its bottom surface, as well as a large radius 864 formed along its two frontal corners. The beveled surface 862 and the enlarged corner radii 864 tightly mate with the complementary surfaces 562 of the anvil 560 such that, when the horn 860 is lowered upon the anvil 560, the edges of the end closure panel 114 and the sealing tabs 120 are pressed tightly between the horn 860 and the anvil 560.

Referring to Figure 59, the horn 860 is supported by a slider plate 861 disposed above the plane of the conveyor 550. The slider plate 861 is fabricated from two plate segments 861A and 861B which are maintained together by plural ball bearings (not shown) to permit the plate segments 861A and 861B to slightly move relative one another in a common plane. As shown, the horn 860 is mounted on the lower plate member 861B and is connected to an ultrasonic generator 866 which in turn is rigidly mounted to the lower plate member 861B. The slider plate 861 includes a pair of bushings 863 extending throughout the height of the slider plate 861 adjacent both ends thereof, which receive a pair of inclined posts 865. As shown, these posts 865 are rigidly mounted adjacent one end to a pair of support beams 867 extending transversely across the plane of the conveyor 550, and are angularly oriented to the vertical plane of the anvil 560. This angular orientation causes the die 860 to be located inboard of the end closure panel 114 of the carton blank 100 when maintained in its stored position, above the plane of the conveyor 550, as indicated in Figure 59.

The slider plate 861 is additionally provided with a rigid extension 869 which protrudes adjacent the rear edge thereof, onto which is mounted a hydraulic or pneumatic actuator 871 connected to the housing of the apparatus (not shown). As will be recognized, by activating the hydraulic cylinder 871, the slider plate 861 reciprocates along the posts 865 in a direction shown by the respective arrow in Figure 59, thereby lowering and raising the sealing horn 860 onto the end closure panel 114 of the carton blank 100.

In operation, the sealing horn 860 is lowered onto the end closure panel 114 of the carton blank 100, in an angular direction as indicated in Figure 60. Due to the angular orientation of the posts 865 with respect to the anvil 560, upon contacting the end closure panel 114, the die base urges or cams the end closure panel 114 downward and toward the closed end of the anvil 560 such that the end closure panel 114 is properly seated upon the sealing tabs 120 of the carton blank 100 (as indicated in Figure 58). As will be recognized, the sealing horn 860, being free to move in a plane normal to the inclined posts 865 due to the bearing interface of the slider plate segments 861A and 861B, self aligns itself with all three of the beveled recesses 562 of the anvil 560 thereby causing a wedging effect between end closure panels 114 and the sealing tabs 120.

While in this position, the beveled edges 862 and the enlarged corner radii 864 of the die 860 firmly press the peripheral edges of the end closure panel 114 tightly against the sealing tabs 120 of the carton blank 100 which are supported from their undersurface by the beveled edges of the anvil 560. Subsequently, the ultrasonic generator 866 is activated, causing the sealing die 860 to rapidly vibrate. This severe vibration results in the settling of the end closure panel 114 and the sealing tabs 120 into proper alignment with the small discontinuities or inconsistencies between the interfacing sealing surfaces being eliminated. Since the anvil 560 is maintained in a stationary position along the con-

veyor 550 and the lower surface of the sealing tabs 120 is gripped by the serrations 563 formed on the beveled recess 562 of the anvil 560 (shown in Figure 50), this relative vibration of the sealing horn 860 against the anvil 560 generates heat exclusively along the peripheral edges of the sealing tab 120 and the end closure panel 114. This heat causes the polyethylene coating on the carton blank 100 to firmly bond the end closure panel 114 to the sealing tabs 120, thereby producing a liquid-tight seal for the carton blank 100, as illustrated in Figure 58.

As previously mentioned, this ultrasonic welding process occurs in a matter of fractions of a second, whereupon, after the sealing of the end closure panel 114 to the sealing tabs 120 of the carton blank 100, the hydraulic cylinder 871 is deactivated, causing the slider plate 861 and the horn 860 to move angularly upward along the posts 865 and back to its initial position.

It will be recognized that alternative methods of sealing the end closure panel 114 to the sealing tab 120 may be utilized in the present invention. However, the applicant has found that, by use of the ultrasonic welding process, the liberation of fumes from the polyethylene substances is significantly eliminated and the polyethylene is heated exclusively adjacent the periphery of the end closure panel 114, thereby eliminating any possible damage to the coating on the remainder of the carton blank 100. Similarly, due to the severe vibration of the ultrasonic welding process, the tab 120 and end panel 114 is consistently aligned in proper position with voids or air pockets between the sealing surfaces being completely eliminated.

Work Station VIII - Filled Carton Ejector

With the liquid sealed within the carton blank 100, the final step to be performed on the apparatus 10 of the present invention is the ejection of the carton blank 100 from the conveyor 550. In the present embodiment, this ejection is accomplished in a simple yet effective manner at Work Station VIII (the Ejector Apparatus) wherein the filled and sealed carton blank 100 is expelled from the apparatus 10 through an aperture 901 formed in the housing 14 (as shown in Figure 1).

Referring to Figures 61, 62, and 63, the ejector apparatus 900 of the present embodiment is illustrated. The apparatus 900 basically comprises a U-shaped fixture 902 which is rigidly mounted at one end to a linkage 904. As will be recognized, in the present embodiment four U-shaped fixtures 902 are symmetrically spaced along the linkage 904 such that all four of the filled and sealed carton blanks 100 contained on the conveyor 550 may be simultaneously ejected from the apparatus.

The common linkage 904 is rigidly attached to a cam plate 905 having a substantially J-shaped cam run 907 formed therein, which cooperates with a cam follower 909 rigidly attached to the housing (not shown) of the apparatus 10. The side walls of the U-shaped fixture 902 are preferably formed having differing lengths 901 and 903 and are spaced sufficiently apart from one another to slidngly receive a carton blank 100 therein. As will be

recognized, the apparatus 900 is positioned beneath the upper horizontal surface of the conveyor 550 and is disposed proximal one end thereof to cooperate with the carton blanks 100 as the conveyor 550 begins its downward travel over the gear drive 561 (similar to the gear 561 shown in Figure 39) and as it subsequently returns toward Work Station IV.

As shown in its stored position in Figure 61 (this position corresponding to the phantom line of Figure 63) when the conveyor 550 begins its downward travel over the gear drive 561, the U-shaped fixture 902 is aligned with the anvil 560 and carton blank 100 contained therein. As such, the carton blank 100 is received between the differing length side walls 901 and 903 of the U-shaped fixture 902. This downward movement of the conveyor 550 continues until the carton blank 100 is disposed in a parallel plane with the U-shaped fixture 902 (as indicated in Figure 61) wherein the conveyor 550 momentarily remains stationary in the manner previously described.

While in this stationary position, the drive mechanism (not shown) connected to the linkage 904 is activated, causing the linkage 904 and the U-shaped fixture 902 to begin its outward movement toward the carton blank 100 in a direction indicated by the respective arrow in Figure 61. As will be recognized, during this initial movement, the cam follower 909 travels through the short straight section of the cam run 907, thereby imparting only an outward component to the travel of the U-shaped fixture 902 (i.e., toward the anvil 560), which facilitates abutment of the rear panel 906 of the U-shaped fixture 902 against the lower end of the carton blank 100.

Further outward travel of the linkage 904 causes the U-shaped fixture 902 (following the cam run 907) to move further outward toward the anvil 560 and to simultaneously move transversely or horizontally across the plane of the anvil 560 (i.e., from right to left as viewed in Figure 61), thereby causing the carton blank 100 to slide toward the open end of the anvil 560. This continued diagonal movement (i.e., outward and transverse) of the linkage 904 causes the carton blank 100 to be pushed forward through the anvil 560 and outward past the open end of the anvil into the position shown in Figure 62. As will be recognized, this diagonal movement avoids interference between the relatively rigid carton corners and the anvil 560.

In this position, the carton blank 100 is no longer maintained in the slight interference fit of the anvil 560 and, due to the interior dimensions of the U-shaped fixture 902 being slightly greater than the distance across the carton segments 102 through 108 of the carton blank 100, the carton 100 may drop from the U-shaped fixture 902 and be carried away by an auxiliary packaging conveyor (not shown).

As will be recognized, by use of the ejector apparatus 900, the sides or carton blank segments 102 through 108 of the carton blank 100 are supported as they are pushed outward and through the anvil 560. The applicant has found that this support of the carton blank 100 during the ejection process eliminates any possibility of bending or deforming of the carton blank 100 which would occur during

direct outward ejection of the carton blank 100 through the anvil opening 560. Further, the ejector apparatus 900 of the present invention automatically accommodates the differing sized containers produced by the apparatus 10 (i.e., 1/2 pint and 1/3 quart), with the decreased length of the smaller 1/3 quart container being compensated by the initial travel of the U-shaped fixture 902 being exclusively in an outward direction which properly enters the carton within the fixture 902.

In summary, it will be recognized that the apparatus and method of the present embodiment provide a significant improvement over the prior art apparatus by providing the increased versatility of producing dual-sized cartons without requiring drastic modification to the apparatus. In particular, to change from the one-half pint to one-third quart size container, the only modifications necessitated by the present invention are (1) the adjustment of the L-shaped alignment block 167 to tightly contact the smaller length of the carton blank segments 102 through 108, (2) the initial pre-loading of the differing sized carton blanks onto the conveyor loader 140 (of Figure 5), (3) the pre-position of the stop 410 further outward upon the length of the anvil 402 to accommodate the shorter length of the carton segments 102 through 108 (as shown in Figure 22), (4) the raising of the lower support members 569 of the conveyor 550 to the position indicated in Figure 39, and (5) the adjustment of the pivot 800 of the timing and metering mechanism 800 to decrease the quantity of liquid discharged through the nozzle 700 (as shown in Figure 41). As will be recognized, all of these minor adjustments may be accomplished in a matter of minutes, thereby easily facilitating the modification of the apparatus and method of the present invention to produce differing sized containers 12.

Further, it will be recognized that the present invention significantly eliminates the space, reliability, versatility, and output deficiencies associated in the prior art apparatus which heretofore have prevented the widespread use and adoption of the straw bearing cartons disclosed herein.

The significant reduction in required floor space was specifically addressed in each Work Station I-VIII of the present invention. In particular, the application of the straw element to the carton blank, as well as the sealing of the tape length to the carton blank, has been consolidated to be performed in sequential operation upon a single rotating drum. Additionally, the carton blank has been rotated through a 180° orientation upon completion of its travel through Work Station I, and returned to a position proximal its initial orientation upon the apparatus. Further, the mechanisms for collating, wrapping, and creasing the carton blank about the forming mandrels have been combined into a single mechanism with the plural forming mandrels being spaced from one another at a distance less than the effective length of the carton blanks 100. Additionally, this combined mechanism allows the collating and creasing of the carton blank to occur simultaneously.

By use of the crossbar mandrel 400 of Work

Station III, the carton blanks have been sealed upon their side and one end without the use of a plurality of transport mechanisms. In addition, once the carton blanks have been inserted upon the conveyor transport 550, the remaining forming, filling, and sealing operations occur without relocating or transferring the carton blanks to a different support system.

The reliability benefits made possible by the present invention are additionally evident throughout each of the major sub-systems of the apparatus. In Work Stations I and II, the carton blank 100 has been continuously engaged by a pair of registry tabs adjacent the end panels 112 and 114, thereby insuring the proper alignment of the carton blank 100 upon the apparatus. As such, the sealing of the straw element and tape length to the carton blank, as well as the accuracy of the creasing and folding of the carton blank, has been maintained within positive limits. Further, the use of the conveyor transport 550 throughout Work Stations III-VIII significantly limits the possibility of misalignment through the remainder of the apparatus.

The significant increased output of the present invention over the prior art apparatus has been made possible by the use of both a serial and parallel track transport system which advantageously coincides the particular serial and parallel transport system with those operations which require the least and most operational time, respectively. Further, since the number of transfer mechanisms have been maintained to a minimum, the overall cycle time of the carton blanks through the apparatus of the present invention has been significantly reduced.

In addition, it should be noted that, throughout the disclosure, reference has been made to a main or common driving mechanism of the apparatus of the present invention to which all of the major sub-systems are synchronized. Although the details of this drive system have not been disclosed, it is well within the knowledge of one skilled in the art to install such a system and synchronize the operation of each of the various component systems disclosed herein with such a main drive.

CLAIMS

1. A method of forming a liquid-tight carton from a foldable, substantially T-shaped carton blank, comprising the steps of:-

- sealing a straw element and tape length over an aperture formed in said carton blank;
- creasing said carton blank into a tubular configuration about a forming mandrel;
- sealing one side and one end of said carton blank upon a single mandrel;
- rotating said carton blank about its axis during transfer of said carton blank from said single mandrel to a conveyor transport;
- preforming said other end of said carton blank into a configuration suitable for sealing while said carton blank is carried by said conveyor;
- filling said carton through said other end of said carton blank with a desired content; and
- sealing said other end of said carton blank.

2. The method of Claim 1 wherein said sealing of said straw element and said tape length occur simultaneously.

3. The method of Claim 1, wherein said preforming step is effected by folding the top edges of said carton blank to form a continuous perimeter edge:

4. The method of claim 3, wherein said sealing step is effected by heating said top edges of said carton blank along said continuous perimeter edge using ultrasonic energy.

5. Apparatus for forming a liquid-tight carton from a foldable substantially T-shaped carton blank to which a tape length and straw element adhered thereto are fixed over an aperture in a panel of the blank, comprising means for sequentially treating the blank having an aperture to fix said tape and straw element thereto; a plurality of mandrels to receive respective serially fed blanks with attached tape and straw element simultaneously to form a plurality of tubular partly formed containers, and a plurality of means, one for each mandrel, thereafter to complete the formation of the tubular partly formed containers fed sequentially from a respective mandrel so that a plurality of containers are completed simultaneously.

6. An apparatus for transferring a single carton blank from a plurality of carton blanks arranged upon a support surface and applying said single carton blank in a predetermined position upon a moving conveyor wherein said single carton blank is aligned for registry with a straw element and a tape length to be applied to said carton on said moving conveyor, wherein:

a pressure member disposed adjacent said support surface, the periphery of said pressure member being spaced from said moving conveyor to form a narrow gap;

means for receiving a single one of said carton blanks from said support surface and entering said single one of said carton blanks into said narrow gap; and

means for reducing said gap in timed coordination with said receiving means and said moving conveyor to press said single carton blank entered into said gap between the periphery of said pressure member and said moving conveyor so that said single carton blank is applied to said moving conveyor at a pre-determined position.

7. The apparatus of claim 6 wherein said pressure member is a rotating member, and said means for reducing said gap comprises an increased diameter section extending around a portion of the periphery of said pressure member.

8. The apparatus of claim 6 wherein said moving conveyor comprises a rotating drum having an axis of rotation parallel to the axis of said rotating pressure member, the outside diameter of said drum being substantially greater than the outside diameter of said pressure member, and being sufficient to ensure said single carton blank is applied to said drum without permanently deforming said carton blank.

9. The apparatus of claim 8 wherein the relative surface speed of said rotating drum and said rotating pressure member are substantially equal.

10. An apparatus for transferring a single straw element onto a conveyor, said device including a hopper for storing a plurality of said straw elements and comprising:

means for separating a single straw element from said plurality of straw elements contained in said hopper;

means for transporting said single straw element from said separating means toward said conveyor, said transporting means rotating in synchronism with said conveyor; and

means mounted proximal said conveyor and adjacent one end of said transporting means for transferring said single straw element from said transporting means into an elongate aperture formed upon said conveyor when said aperture and said transporting means are juxtaposed and synchronously moving.

11. The device of claim 10 wherein said separating means comprises a rotating wheel having one or more peripheral apertures sized to receive a single straw element and said transporting means comprises a rotating cylinder juxtaposed said separating means including channel means formed axially along its periphery for receiving said single straw element from said separating means as said channel means rotates past said apertures formed in said separating means.

12. The device of claim 11 wherein said rotating cylinder includes driving means reciprocal axially in said channel means for moving said single straw element contained in said channel means toward said conveyor.

13. The device of claim 12 wherein said rotating cylinder includes an axially extending straw guide member aligned with said channel means having a sufficient length to contain a plurality of said single straw elements positioned in an end-to-end orientation, said guide member extending axially between said channel means and said conveyor.

14. The device of claim 13 wherein said transferring means includes a stationary strut member having an inclined top surface, the leading edge of said top surface aligned to engage the lower surface of said straw element as said transporting means rotates past said strut member to cam said straw element into said elongate aperture formed on said conveyor.

15. A device for sealing a length of tape over an aperture formed in a carton blank and bonding said length of tape to a straw element disposed beneath said aperture, said device comprising:

means for carrying said carton blank with said tape length and said straw element aligned with said aperture; and

means for contacting said tape length in a localized area adjacent said aperture and for thermally sealing said tape length to said carton blank and simultaneously bonding a portion of said tape length to said straw element.

16. The device of claim 15 wherein said contacting means comprises a plate member including a lower surface having a raised boss sized to surround said aperture and a raised tab disposed within said boss, said boss and tab engaging said tape length

and said carton blank.

17. The device of claim 15 wherein said contacting means is mounted within said carrying means and positioned beneath an aperture formed on said carrying means, and further including means for reciprocating said contacting means to sequentially move said contacting means (a) outward through said aperture to be spaced above said carrying means, (b) forward in the direction of travel of said carrying means to contact said tape length, and (c) off of said tape length and back through said access aperture to reside within said carrying means.

18. The device of claim 15 wherein said carrying means comprises a rotating drum and said contacting means contacts said tape length during a 180-degree arcuate rotation of said drum.

19. In an apparatus for forming a liquid-tight carton from a foldable carton blank sheet having an aperture formed therein, a device for applying a length of tape over said aperture while said carton blank is maintained upon a support surface comprising:

a first rotatable member including a land section extending radially therefrom, said land section being proximal said support surface when said land section is rotated toward said support surface;

a second rotatable member disposed adjacent said first member having a parallel axis with said first member and spaced further from said support surface, said second member including a pressure section extending radially therefrom;

guide means for positioning a length of tape tangentially between said first and second members;

means for synchronously rotating said first and second members to place said land section and said pressure section in close proximity once during each revolution, to engage said length of tape once during each revolution, said engagement causing said length of tape to be sequentially advanced from said tape guide and sheared to a desired length; and means for transferring said desired length of tape from said land section to said carton blank maintained upon said support surface.

20. The device of claim 19 wherein said pressure section reciprocates radially inward toward said second member in response to said engagement so that said tape length is pressed against said land section and advanced from said guide means across the width of said land section during each revolution.

21. The device of claim 19 wherein said pressure section includes cutting means positioned adjacent one edge thereof, said cutting means being exposed during said reciprocation of said pressure section to overlap and shear said tape length adjacent one edge of said land section.

22. In an apparatus for forming a liquid-tight carton from a foldable carton blank of sheet material, a device for forming said carton blank into an open end tubular configuration, said device including a mandrel having an outer configuration sized to the desired tubular configuration of said carton blank and comprising:

jaw means separated and surrounding said mandrel;

drel;

means for inserting said carton blank between said jaw means and said mandrel to surround said mandrel with said carton blank without creasing said carton blank; and

means for closing said jaw means around said mandrel to crease said carton blank about said mandrel.

23. The device of claim 22 wherein said jaw means comprises an L-shaped member surrounding two sides of said mandrel and a substantially planar member pivoted to said L-shaped member for abutting a third side of said mandrel.

24. The device of claim 23 wherein said L-shaped member and said substantially planar member have spring means mounted to one surface thereof to stretch said carton blank tightly against said mandrel.

25. The device of claim 24 wherein means are provided for reciprocating said jaw means along the length of said mandrel to remove said carton blank from said mandrel.

26. In an apparatus for forming a liquid-tight carton from a foldable carton blank having an open ended tubular body member and a pair of end panels extending outward adjacent opposite ends of said body member, a device for sealing one side and one end of said carton blank while said carton blank is continuously carried upon a mandrel comprising:

a rotatable arbor;

a mandrel formed to carry said carton blank, said mandrel rigidly mounted at one end to said arbor for movement between a first and second position;

creasing means spaced from said first position of said mandrel for folding a portion of said body member tightly against the other end of said mandrel;

means proximal said first position of said mandrel for engaging said body member to form a liquid-tight seal along one side of said carton blank;

means located between said first and second mandrel position for folding one of said end panels over said other end of said mandrel; and

means at said second position of said mandrel for sealing said end panel to said portion of said body member folded over said other end of said mandrel.

27. The device of claim 26 wherein said creasing means is characterized by:

a plurality of jaw members each spaced laterally outward from a side of said mandrel and reciprocable in a direction toward said mandrel to contact said portion of said body member.

28. The device of claim 26 wherein said engaging means includes means for pressing the two adjacent sides of said body portion tightly against said mandrel.

29. The device of claim 26 wherein said means for engaging said body member to form a side seal and said means for sealing said end panel both include an ultrasonic wave generator.

30. The device of claim 26 wherein said rotatable arbor includes a plurality of said mandrels rigidly attached thereon, the distal ends of said mandrels spaced from one another at a distance equal to the distance travelled between said first and second

mandrel position.

31. The device of claim 30 wherein said mandrel includes a third position wherein said carton blank is aligned for removal from said mandrel.

5 32. The device of claim 26 wherein said side seal and said end panel seal simultaneously at said first and second mandrel positions respectively.

33. In an apparatus for fabricating a liquid-tight carton, a device for axially rotating a carton blank
10 formed in a tubular configuration, comprising:
a tubular fixture sized to receive said carton blank;
means connected to said fixture to selectively rotate said fixture between a first and second position; and

15 means for inserting a carton blank into said fixture when said fixture is in said first position, and ejecting said carton blank from said fixture when said fixture is in said second position.

34. In an apparatus for forming a liquid-tight
20 carton, a device to insert a tubular carton blank having a relatively rigid closed end and a relatively flexible central wall portion into a U-shaped anvil having an open side and adapted to carry said carton blank without deforming said carton blank, said
25 device comprising:

a receiver sized to loosely house said relatively rigid closed end of said tubular carton blank, said receiver disposed adjacent said one side of said anvil;

30 means for inserting said tubular carton blank into said receiver so said closed end lies within said receiver and said sidewall portion of said carton blank extends outwardly beyond said receiver to lie within the plane of said anvil; and

35 means to reciprocate said fixture laterally toward said anvil to place said carton blank sidewall portion in said anvil.

35. The device of claim 34 wherein said receiver is a U-shaped fixture which extends substantially
40 along three sidewalls of said carton blank.

36. The device of claim 34 wherein said anvil is mounted upon a conveyor and said receiver and said means for reciprocating said receiver are disposed within the interior of said conveyor.

45 37. In an apparatus for forming a liquid-tight carton from a foldable carton blank, a device for preforming the top edges and an end panel extending outward from one of said top edges of said carton blank into a configuration suitable for sealing
50 and bonding said end panel to said carton blank without an internal mandrel, comprising:

an anvil adapted to carry said carton blank having an angular recess formed adjacent its top surface;

55 means for registering said carton blank within said mandrel so that said end panel and a portion of said top edges of said carton blank extend above the top surface of said mandrel;

means for creasing said end panel to form a beveled perimeter edge;

60 means for indenting two corners of said carton blank lying opposite said one panel adjacent said top edges to extend within the interior of said carton blank;

65 means for folding said portion of said top edges extending above said top surface of said anvil within

the interior of said carton blank; and

means for pressing said top edges against said angular recess formed in said anvil to form a beveled perimeter along the top edges of said carton blank.

70 38. The device of claim 37 wherein said registering means comprises a first die adapted to contact said top edges of said carton blank and tightly seat said carton blank upon a support member disposed beneath said anvil.

75 39. The device of claim 38 wherein one sidewall of said first die includes a shallow cavity having tapered walls and a plate member having a surface formed complementary to said shallow cavity and pivotally mounted adjacent said shallow cavity, said
80 plate member adapted to pivot toward said first die and form a beveled perimeter on said end panel.

40. The device of claim 37 wherein said folding means comprises a second die including a plurality of plates positioned and pivotally mounted adjacent
85 the sides of said second die to engage said top edges of said carton blank.

41. The device of claim 40 further characterized by including:

90 means for pivoting said plates from a first position angularly oriented with said top edges of said carton blank having a lower edge lying partially within the angular recess formed in said anvil and an upper
edge extending within the interior of the plane of said carton blank.

95 42. The device of claim 41 wherein said plate pivoting means pivots said plates to a second position with said upper edge of said plate lowered to lie substantially below the top surface of said anvil to fold said portion of said top edge of said carton
100 blank within the interior of said carton blank.

43. The device of claim 42 wherein said indenting means comprises:

105 a pair of pins disposed outward from said second die and aligned diagonally with said two corners of said carton blank; and

means for reciprocating said pins to engage said carton blank and indent said two corners within the interior of said carton blank.

110 44. The device of claim 43 wherein said pressing means comprises a third die having a lower surface formed complementary to said angular recess in said anvil and adapted to contact said top edges of said carton blank and press said top edges outward against the angular recess in said anvil.

115 45. An accurate discharge nozzle comprising a housing, an inlet and outlet formed in said housing, and an aperture connecting said inlet to said outlet, wherein there are provided:

120 a spool, internally reciprocable within said aperture including channel means for defining a flow path in said aperture;

a valve seat formed by said aperture adjacent said outlet; and

125 a valve member formed on one end of said spool, said valve member opening and closing said nozzle in response to the position of said spool in said aperture.

46. The accurate discharge nozzle of claim 45 wherein said channel means provides a constant cross-sectional ratio between said inlet and said

outlet irrespective of the position of said spool within said aperture.

47. The accurate discharge nozzle of claim 45 wherein the cross-sectional area of said outlet is
5 formed substantially larger than the cross-sectional area of said inlet, said larger outlet area dissipating pressure and attenuating the velocity of fluid passage through said nozzle.

48. The accurate discharge nozzle of claim 45
10 wherein said valve seat comprises a beveled annulus formed adjacent one end of said aperture which directs fluid passing through said nozzle inward toward the center line of said outlet.

49. The accurate discharge nozzle of claim 45
15 comprising an enlarged toroidal cavity which is formed concentric with said aperture and interconnects said aperture to said inlet.

50. A mechanism for timing the discharge of a filler nozzle with the position of a carton carried upon
20 a transport mechanism, comprising:

an arm member reciprocable in response to driving means co-ordinated with the travel of said transport mechanism;

a rocker arm pivotally mounted intermediate its
25 length to said filler nozzle and connected adjacent one end to said arm member;

means pivotally connected adjacent said other end of said rocker arm for providing a fulcrum for said rocker arm; and

30 means for maintaining said fulcrum stationary when said carton is present beneath said filler nozzle, thereby providing a rigid fulcrum for said rocker arm so that reciprocation of said arm member

causes a corresponding reciprocation of said filler
35 nozzle, said means permitting reciprocal movement of said fulcrum when a carton is not present beneath said filler nozzle so that said fulcrum is free to reciprocate in an inverse direction and at a proportional rate to said reciprocation of said arm member
40 so that said filler nozzle remains stationary.

51. The mechanism of claim 50 further characterized by said means for maintaining said fulcrum comprising a pressure actuated cylinder having a reciprocable piston pivotally connected at one end to
45 said rocker arm.

52. The mechanism of claim 50 further characterized by said filler nozzle additionally including a metering pump to supply a desired quantity of liquid to said filler nozzle and said reciprocation of said arm
50 member causes said metering pump to sequentially intake and discharge a quantity of liquid for subsequent passage through said nozzle.

53. In an apparatus for forming a liquid-tight carton wherein said carton is carried by a yoke
55 adjacent one end of said carton, a device for ejecting said carton from said yoke without deforming or puncturing said carton blank comprising:

fixture means disposed on one side of said yoke to receive the other end of said carton blank; and

60 means to sequentially reciprocate said fixture means to move said carton first outward partially through said yoke and secondly angularly outward and perpendicular to the plane of said yoke so that said carton blank is ejected from said yoke adjacent
65 said open end of said yoke.